

## FALL 2023 NO.4

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# HOOVER DIGEST

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**RESEARCH + COMMENTARY ON PUBLIC POLICY**

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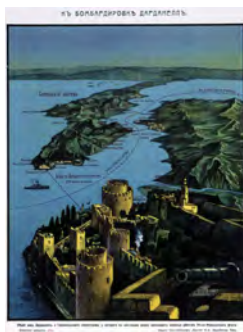
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## ON THE COVER

This bird's-eye Russian map from 1915 shows the Dardanelles, the narrow waterway controlling access to the Sea of Marmara and the Black Sea. Together with the even-narrower Bosphorus, the passage divides Europe from Asia—and Istanbul from itself—and figures prominently in history, both ancient and modern. The Trojan War was fought here. The map illustrates a bloody campaign fought during the first years of the First World War that proved significant to the birth of modern Turkey, which this month is a hundred years old. See story, page 169.



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# Gulliver's Economy

**Hoover fellow John H. Cochrane laments America's lost economic growth: "We are a great Gulliver, tied down by miles of Lilliputian red tape."**

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**By John H. Cochrane**

*Hoover senior fellow John H. Cochrane has been awarded the 19th annual Bradley Prize, an honor bestowed on "scholars and practitioners whose accomplishments reflect the Lynde and Harry Bradley Foundation's mission to restore, strengthen, and protect the principles and institutions of American exceptionalism." He shared the honor with Nina Shea and Betsy DeVos. Here is the text of his remarks at the May ceremony.*

**C**reeping stagnation ought to be recognized as the central economic issue of our time. Economic growth since 2000 has fallen almost by half compared with the last half of the twentieth century. The average American's income is already a quarter less than under the previous trend. If this trend continues, lost growth in fifty

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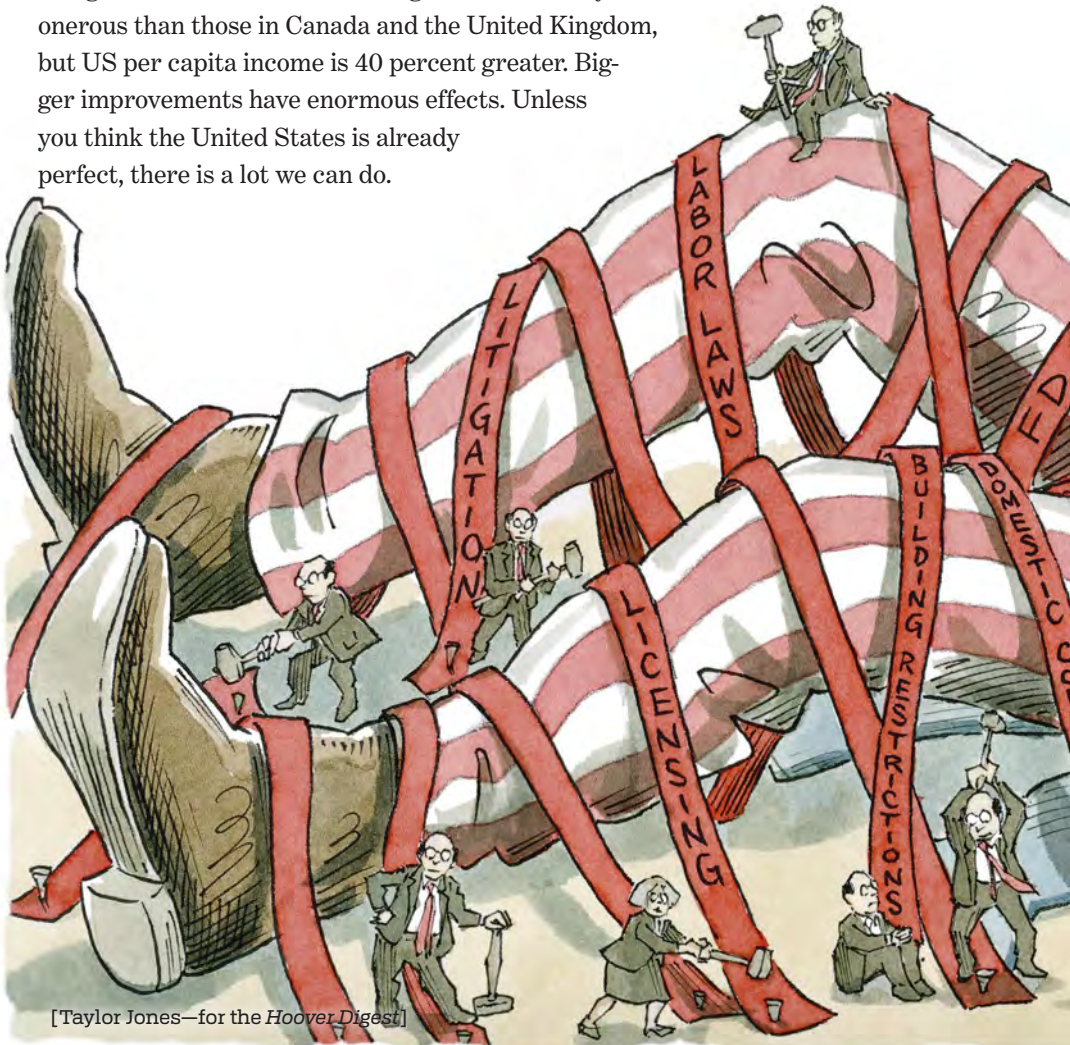
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years will total three times today's economy. No economic issue—inflation, recession, trade, climate, income diversity—comes close to such numbers.

Growth is not just more stuff, it's vastly better goods and services; it's health, environment, education, and culture; it's defense, social programs, and repaying government debt.

Why are we stagnating? In my view, the answer is simple: America has the people, the ideas, and the investment capital to grow. We just can't get the permits. We are a great Gulliver, tied down by miles of Lilliputian red tape.

How much more can the United States grow? Looking around the world, we see that even slightly better institutions produce large improvements in living standards. US taxes and regulations are only a bit less onerous than those in Canada and the United Kingdom, but US per capita income is 40 percent greater. Bigger improvements have enormous effects. Unless you think the United States is already perfect, there is a lot we can do.



[Taylor Jones—for the *Hoover Digest*]



How can we improve the US economy? I offer four examples.

**Health care.** I don't need to tell you how dysfunctional health care and insurance are. Just look at your latest absurd bill.

There is no reason that health care cannot be provided in the same way as lawyering, accounting, architecture, construction, airplane travel, car repair, or any complex personal service. Let a brutally competitive market offer us better service at lower prices. There is no reason that health insurance cannot function at least as well as life, car, property, or other insurance. It's easy to address



standard objections, such as pre-existing conditions, asymmetric information, and so on.

How did we get in this mess? There are two original sins. First, in order to get around wage controls during World War II, the government allowed a tax deduction for employer-based group plans, but not for portable insurance. Thus, pre-existing conditions were born: if you lose your job, you lose health insurance. Patch after patch then led to the current mess.

Second, the government wants to provide health care to poor people, but without visibly taxing and spending a lot. So, the government forces hospitals to treat poor people below cost and recoup the money by overcharging everyone else. But an overcharge cannot stand competition, so the government protects hospitals and insurers from competition. You'll know health care is competitive when, rather than hide prices, hospitals spam us with offers as airlines and cell phone companies do.

There is no reason why everyone's health care and insurance must be so screwed up to help the poor. A bit of taxing and spending instead—budgeted, appropriated, visible—would not stymie competition and innovation.

**Banks.** Banking offers plenty of room for improvement. In 1933, the United States suffered a great bank run. Our government responded with deposit insurance. Guaranteeing deposits stops runs, but it's like sending your brother-in-law to Las Vegas with your credit card—what we economists call an “incentive for risk taking.” The government piled on regulations to try to stop banks from taking risks. The banks got around the regulations, new

crises erupted, new guarantees and regulations followed. This past spring, the regulatory juggernaut failed to detect simple interest-rate risk and

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***America has the people, the ideas, and the investment capital to grow. We just can't get the permits.***

Silicon Valley Bank had a run, followed by others. The Fed and FDIC bailed out depositors and promised more rules.

This system is fundamentally broken. The answer: deposits should flow to accounts backed by reserves at the Fed, or short-term treasuries. Banks should get money for risky loans by issuing stock or long-term debt that can't run. We can end private sector financial crises forever, with next to no regulation.

There is a lesson in these stories. If we want to improve regulations, we can't just bemoan them. We must understand how they emerged.



As in health and banking, a regulatory mess often emerges from a continual patchwork, in which each step is a roughly sensible repair of the previous regulation's dysfunction. The little old lady swallowed a fly, a spider to catch the fly, and so on. Now horse is on the menu. Only a start-from-scratch reform will work.

Much regulation protects politically influential businesses, workers, and other constituencies from the disruptions of growth. Responsive democracies give people what they want, good and hard. And in return, regulation extorts political support from those beneficiaries. We have to fix the regulatory structure, to give growth a seat at the table.

Economists are somewhat at fault too. They are taught to look at every problem, diagnose "market failure," and advocate new rules to be implemented by an omniscient, benevolent planner. But we do not live in a free market. When you see a problem, look first for the regulation that caused it.

**Taxation.** Taxes are a mess, with high marginal rates that discourage work, investment, and production; disappointing revenue; and massive, wasteful complexity. How can

the government raise revenue while doing the least damage to the economy? A uniform consumption tax is the

clear answer. Tax money when people spend it. When earnings are saved, invested, plowed into businesses that produce goods and services and employ people, leave them alone.

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***If we want to improve regulations, we can't just bemoan them. We must understand how they emerged.***

**Bad incentives.** These are the unsung central problem of our social programs. Roughly speaking, if your income is zero to about sixty thousand dollars, if you earn an extra dollar, you lose a dollar of benefits. Fix the incentives, and more people will get ahead in life. We will also better help the truly needy, and the budget.

Some more general points unite these stories.

Focus on incentives. Politics and punditry are consumed with taking from A to give to B. Incentives are far more important for economic growth, and we can say something objective about them.

Find the question. Politics and punditry usually advance answers without stating the question, or shop around for questions to justify the same old answers. Most people who disagree with the consumption tax really have different goals than funding the government with minimum economic

damage. Well, what do you want the tax system to do? State the question, let's find the best answer to the question, and we can make a lot of progress.

Look at the whole system. Tax disincentives come from the total difference between the value your additional work creates and what you can consume as a result. Between these lie payroll, income, excise, property, estate, sales, and corporate taxes, and more, at the federal, state, and local level. Greg Mankiw figured his all-in marginal tax rate at 90 percent, and even he left out sales, property, and a few more taxes. Social-program disincentives come from the loss of food stamps, housing subsidies, Medicaid or ObamaCare subsidies, disability payments, tax credits, and so on, down to low-income parking passes. And look at taxes and social programs together. A flat tax that finances checks to worthy people is very progressive government, if you want that. Looking at an individual tax or program for its disincentives or progressivity is silly.

The list goes on. Horrible public education, labor laws, licensing laws, zoning, building and planning restrictions, immigration restrictions, regulatory barriers, endless lawsuits, prevailing-wage and domestic-content rules, are all sand in the productivity gears. Oh, and I haven't even gotten to money and inflation yet!

And that just fixes our current economy. Long-term growth comes from new ideas. Many economists say we have run out of ideas; growth is ending; slice the pie. I look out the window and I see factory-built mini nuclear power plants that the Nuclear Regulatory Commission is strangling; I see a historic breakthrough in artificial intelligence facing an outcry for the government to stop it. I see advances in biology that portend much better health and longevity, but good luck getting FDA approval or increasingly politicized research funding.

Many conservatives disparage this "incentive economics" as outdated and boring. That attitude is utterly wrong. Incentives, and the freedom, rights,

and rule of law that preserve incentives, remain the key to tremendous and widespread prosperity. And it is hard work to

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***"Fix regulations" is a tougher slogan than "free money for voters."***

understand and fix the incentives behind today's problems.

Yes, supply is less glamorous than stimulus. "Fix regulations" is a tougher slogan than "free money for voters." Efficiency requires detailed reform in every agency and market, the Marie Kondo approach to our civic life. But

it's possible. And we don't need to reform all the dinosaurs. As we have seen with telephones, airlines, and taxis, we just need to allow new competitors, to allow the buds of freedom to grow.

Many people ask, "How can we get leaders to listen?" That's the wrong question. Believe in democracy, not bending the emperor's ear. Take action. My fellow prizewinners have grabbed the levers of influence that belong to citizens of our free society and have done the hard work of reforming its institutions. And ideas matter. The Hoover Institution motto is "ideas defining a free society." The Bradley Foundation tonight celebrates good ideas and is devoted to spreading them. When voters, media, the chattering classes, and institutions of civil society understand, advance, and apply these ideas, politicians will swiftly follow. ■

### *Special to the Hoover Digest.*



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# *(Don't) Play It Again*

**Economic problems don't go away forever. Nor do the bad ideas about how to solve them.**

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**By Michael J. Boskin**

Watch the news, and you may find yourself feeling as if you are watching the past on playback. We see replays of high inflation, soaring public debt, a brutal ground war in Europe, a new cold war, and the rise of potentially destructive technologies.

Readers might recall that I predicted rising inflation and slower growth as early as spring 2021. Former US treasury secretary Larry Summers did so even earlier. Yet today's inflation—the worst since the early 1980s—caught most people by surprise.

Supply-chain snarls, including energy-market and food-system disruptions linked to Russia's war on Ukraine, contributed to the initial surge in prices. But the main driver of today's inflation has been profligate

## **Key points**

» Profligate monetary and fiscal policies are the main drivers of today's inflation.

» Amid friction with Russia and China, the world seems to be on the brink of a new cold war.

» Technological advances, especially artificial intelligence, are disrupting economies and upending expectations.

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*Michael J. Boskin is the Wohlford Family Senior Fellow at the Hoover Institution and the Tully M. Friedman Professor of Economics at Stanford University. He is a member of Hoover's task forces on energy policy, economic policy, and national security.*

monetary and fiscal policies, which were upheld despite quicker-than-expected recoveries from pandemic lockdowns.

For example, President Joe Biden's \$1.9 trillion American Rescue Plan, implemented in March 2021, was nearly three times as large as the Congressional Budget Office's estimate of the GDP gap that still needed to be closed for the economy to reach its potential. One cannot but notice the echoes of President Lyndon B. Johnson's use of debt to finance the Vietnam War and the War on Poverty in the late 1960s.

Meanwhile, the Federal Reserve kept its target interest rate close to zero for too long, and started to unwind its balance sheet too late—an approach that recalls the monetary-policy mistakes it made under chairman Arthur Burns in the 1970s. Central bankers thought that it would not hurt to let inflation run above the 2 percent target for a while before bringing it back down, because they had undershot the target previously.

There are short-term benefits to running the economy “hot.” Just before the COVID-19 pandemic, US unemployment was low, minority groups had the lowest poverty rate in history, and wages were rising fastest at the bottom of the distribution. For the first time in decades, inequality was declining.

But the economic and political price has come

due. Core inflation (which excludes food and energy prices) in the United States was 5.3 percent as of May 2023. While it is down a bit from its peak, it has rotated to stickier services prices, and remains almost three times the Fed's target. The central-bank creed is that the short-run interest rate must run above inflation for some time before inflation—after a “long and variable lag”—falls toward the target rate.

Wages have not kept pace with inflation, and most households, especially those which expansionary policies were supposed to help, have been experiencing a decline in real income for two years. Though unemployment remains very low and the US economy has outperformed much of the rest of the world, a poll last spring showed that almost half of the US population thinks the country is already in a recession, and most Americans expect their children and grandchildren to be worse off than their elders. This perceived demise of the “American dream” has left the public—and politics—deeply unsettled.

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***A perceived demise of the “American dream” has left the public—and politics—deeply unsettled.***



## CONFLICTS TO COME

Another replay that caught most of the world by surprise is the ferocious ground war in Europe. But Russian President Vladimir Putin had clearly telegraphed his plans for Ukraine. Beyond lamenting in 2005 that the Soviet Union's demise was the greatest tragedy of the twentieth



[Taylor Jones—for the Hoover Digest]



century—worse than World War II, apparently, when twenty million Russians died—he had seized part of Georgia in 2008 and annexed Crimea in 2014.

Then, despite all the global economic integration of recent decades, the world seemed to be on the brink of a new cold war. China's increasing economic, diplomatic, and military assertiveness, together with its deepening ties with Russia, has raised fears about a realignment in international relations, and even a new clash of systems.

The original Cold War pitted totalitarian regimes with centrally planned economies against mixed-capitalist democracies, led by an economically and militarily dominant United States. This time, it is autocratic state capitalism versus social-welfare democracies, and America's resolve and capabilities are in doubt.

Particularly worrisome, nonaligned actors are hedging their bets, and the United States appears to be asleep at the wheel. The China-brokered

rapprochement between Saudi Arabia and Iran, a sponsor of terrorism and a supplier of advanced military drones to Russia, stands out. Does this

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***Particularly worrisome, nonaligned actors on the world stage are hedging their bets.***

mark a return to traditional balance-of-power geopolitics, or is it a prelude to conflict between the United States and China over Taiwan?

## **TECHNOLOGICAL WORRIES**

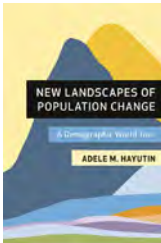
Finally, technological advances are disrupting economies and upending expectations about the future. Technology has been transforming economies and displacing workers since well before we had a term—Schumpeterian “creative destruction”—for the phenomenon. But economies have generally adjusted: computers, for example, did not end up causing massive structural unemployment because the workforce was redeployed to other jobs. In any case, standards of living rose.

Will this be the case for artificial intelligence? Even tech leaders are not so sure. In March, a group including Elon Musk called for a six-month (or longer) pause on advanced AI development to gain a better understanding of the risks the technology poses and devise ways to mitigate them. Musk thinks those risks include the very destruction of human civilization, and claimed in an interview that Google co-founder Larry Page once called him a “speciesist” for wanting to safeguard humanity from AI.



Ultimately, AI is a tool. It can be used for good, for example, to develop new drugs and diagnostics. But it can also be used to do great harm, such as to abet repression in China. I remain cautiously optimistic that we can overcome, or at least sufficiently manage, this challenge, as well as the others mentioned here. But, given widespread nuclear proliferation, the costs of failure could bring the most unwelcome replay of all. ■

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# Security in Numbers

**According to research by Hoover fellows John F. Cogan and Daniel L. Heil, older Americans' income has soared. Good news on its own, this could enable us to avoid the looming entitlement debt.**

**By Jonathan Movroydis**

Research by Hoover senior fellow John F. Cogan and policy fellow Daniel L. Heil has uncovered a substantial growth in income of American senior citizens over the past four decades. From 1982 to 2018, the median income of households headed by people sixty-five and older rose 85 percent, after adjusting for inflation. This growth was four times as fast as the increase among households headed by younger people. Cogan

## Key points

- » The median senior household income is now about the same as the median household income among younger generations. This is profoundly different from forty years ago.
- » Social Security, Medicare, and other programs for elders make up an ever-rising part of federal spending growth.
- » One option for making federal programs solvent is to slow the rate of growth in Social Security benefits.

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*John F. Cogan is the Leonard and Shirley Ely Senior Fellow at the Hoover Institution and participates in Hoover's task forces on energy, the economy, and health care. Daniel L. Heil is a policy fellow at the Hoover Institution. Jonathan Movroydis is the senior content writer for the Hoover Institution.*



and Heil found that the biggest drivers of senior income growth were private retirement savings and changes in work patterns; they found a remarkable rise in employment among older people, as well as in participation in defined-contribution plans. For most seniors, Social Security played a surprisingly small role. The data demonstrate that the median senior household income, adjusted for household size and taxes, is now about the same as the median household income among younger generations, a drastic difference from forty years ago.

These findings have important policy implications for addressing

the rising costs of Social Security and Medicare. The increased income among seniors from private sources, Cogan and Heil say, presents an opportunity to reduce the growing fiscal burden—in particular, by reforming Social Security and Medicare to make them more progressive to the benefit of lower-income seniors.

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***“Both Medicare and Social Security, the two main programs for senior citizens, will become insolvent within the next decade.”***

**Jonathan Movroydis:** What prompted you to conduct this research?

**John F. Cogan:** Two challenges that concern us most are, first, the cost of senior citizen federal entitlement programs. The other is that both Medicare and Social Security, the two main programs for senior citizens, will become insolvent within the next decade. Let me talk about the budget problem first.

Reining in the growth of the national debt is the central fiscal challenge facing the country. It can't be done without slowing the growth in expenditures on programs for the elderly or imposing a very large tax increase on the middle class. Social Security, Medicare, and other programs for senior citizens now account for 40 percent of all noninterest federal spending. In the next ten years, if these programs aren't reformed, they will account for almost 80 percent of the growth in federal spending. Stopping the growth in the national debt without altering these programs would require an across-the-board tax increase of around 70 percent.

**Daniel L. Heil:** The Social Security trustees just released new numbers. The trustees' report showed that the trust fund is due to be insolvent by 2034. Medicare's Hospital Insurance Trust Fund is going to be insolvent by about 2028. When those days arrive, Congress better have a plan in place to reform those programs. And it's important that our policy makers enact reforms soon, because if they wait until 2028 or 2034, then the only options are higher taxes

or draconian spending cuts. In our research, we highlight who is currently being helped by these programs and who still needs help, and we provide policy makers a close look at recipients' incomes—information policy makers need when they consider how they should reform these two programs.

**Cogan:** The issues surrounding Social Security and Medicare, which account for the lion's share of federal spending on the elderly, are politically explosive. A few months ago, President Biden, in his State of the Union address, said that the Republicans were going to cut these programs. Immediately, the Republicans shouted out, "No, no!" What Danny and I hope to accomplish with the publication of this paper is to inform the debate with facts to allow for a dispassionate analysis of the options for making Social Security and Medicare solvent.

**Movroydis:** What are the biggest drivers of the senior income growth?

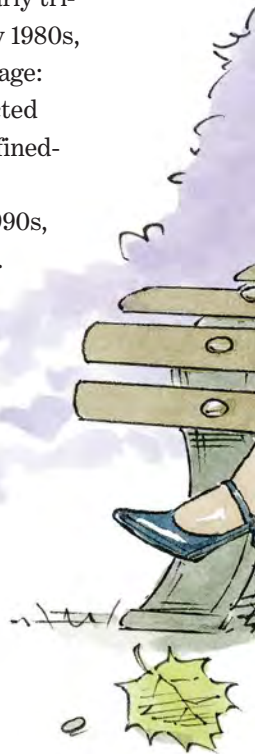
**Cogan:** There have been two main drivers behind the growth in the median income of senior households: income from private retirement plans, and income from employment.

Income from retirement plans over the past forty years has increased by about 300 percent; that's a fourfold increase. Labor earnings have nearly tripled. There is a policy reason for both dramatic increases. In the early 1980s, the two main types of defined-contribution plans were just coming of age: individual retirement accounts and 401(k) plans, which had been enacted in 1974 and 1978, respectively. The growth of participation in those defined-contribution plans has boosted private retirement income for seniors.

For employment, the situation is a little bit different. Since the mid-1990s, there has been a historic change in the employment patterns of seniors. Employment among both senior men and women has been steadily rising. This is a reversal of a trend since at least the end of World War II for men and at least since the beginning of the 1960s for women.

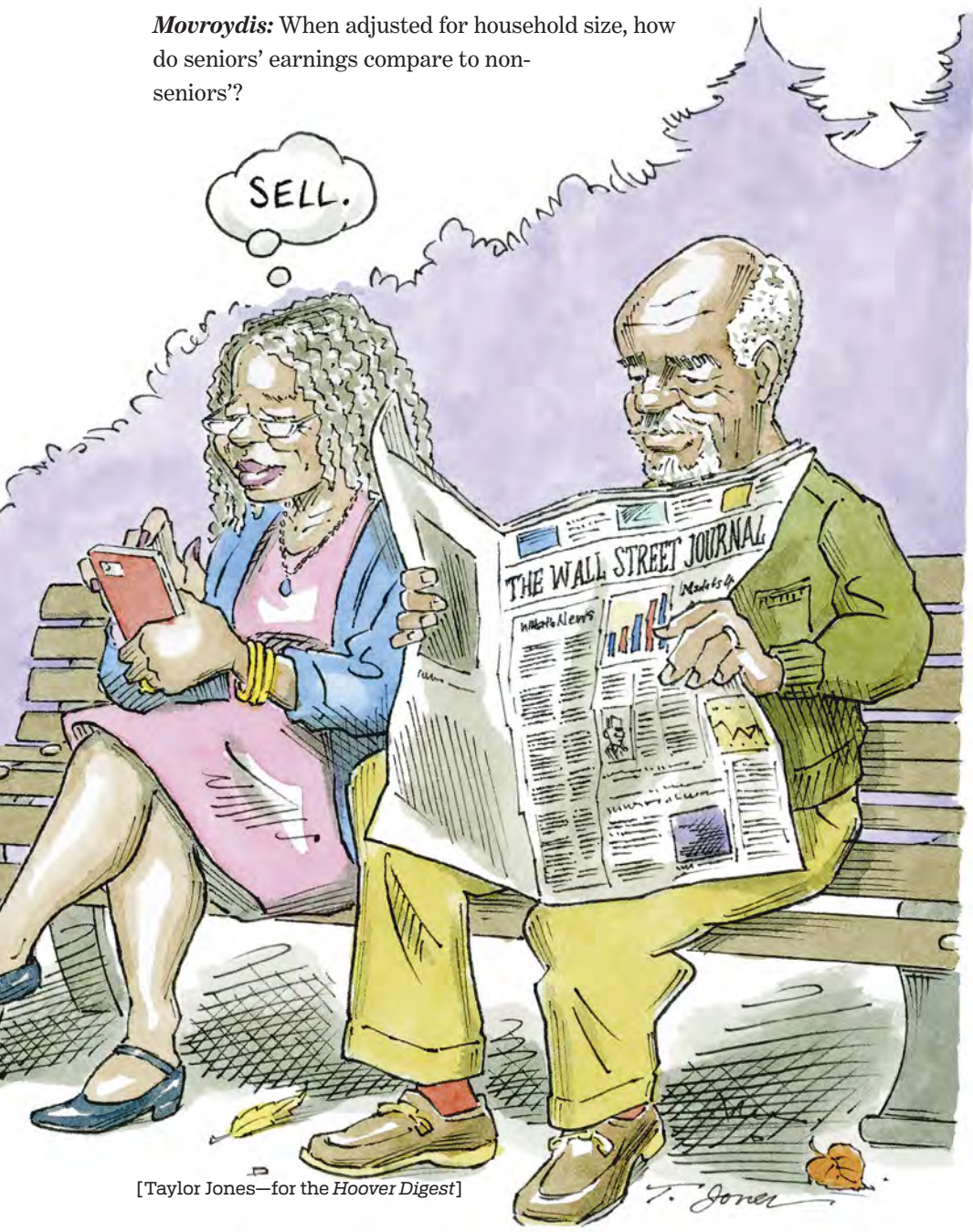
**Heil:** For low-income seniors, we see the growth in both employment earnings and in retirement income, but still about half of the growth is from increases in Social Security benefits. Among the upper half of the income distribution, we find higher growth in Social Security income than in the bottom half, but Social Security is much more important to low-income seniors, as you would expect.

**Movroydis:** What is the factor driving that income growth among older seniors?



**Cogan:** Their Social Security income growth wasn't a significant factor. In fact, the factors were increased employment among this group, private savings plans, and overall asset accumulation over their lifetimes.

**Movroydis:** When adjusted for household size, how do seniors' earnings compare to non-seniors'?



[Taylor Jones—for the Hoover Digest]

**Cogan:** One of the more remarkable findings of our work is that the median senior household income is now about the same as the median household income among younger households, after adjusting for household size and taxes. This is a drastic difference from forty years ago.

This convergence of senior and non-senior adjusted income occurs across the income distribution. An especially important finding is that incomes among low-income seniors have risen much faster than the incomes among low-income younger populations.

**Heil:** There are also other costs that we haven't included, such as health care. But generally, the point stands that once you control for taxes and

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***“Incomes among low-income seniors have risen much faster than the incomes among low-income younger populations.”***

household size, you really don't see a difference in median incomes between seniors and non-seniors. This trend started in the late 1990s, and the adjusted incomes

converged by 2012. In the past ten years, there has not been a whole lot of difference between seniors and non-seniors, at least around middle-income levels.

**Cogan:** One additional point: the growth in senior incomes has been broad-based. The purchasing power of income among seniors at the 25th and 75th percentile of the senior household income distribution nearly doubled, after adjusting for inflation. Seniors today who are at the 25th percentile of the income distribution have as much purchasing power as a median-income senior household in 1982. So low-income seniors today are living just as well as the typical senior forty years ago.

There is a particular concern in policy circles about income levels of very old seniors. However, we found that over the past forty years, incomes of seniors in households headed by persons seventy-five years or older grew faster than those in the households headed by persons sixty-five to seventy, and seventy to seventy-four.

**Heil:** This isn't just in percentage terms, but in the absolute dollar value. So, it wasn't that they were just starting at a lower base.

**Cogan:** Right. This comes back full circle to our original point, just how broad-based the income growth was among seniors.



**Movroydis:** Can we expect, though, when these non-seniors reach retirement age, that their earnings will grow at the same rate that seniors are experiencing today?

**Cogan:** Tough to say. One of the big disruptions in recent years, of course, was the COVID-19 pandemic. Now certainly, if Danny and I were answering your question in 2019 or early 2020, we would have said that there is absolutely no reason why the trends that we have observed in the data, both for retirement income and for work patterns among seniors, wouldn't continue in the future. The pandemic, however, was a big disruption to work patterns, not just among seniors, of course, but among the entire population.

What we have seen so far is that there has been a very strong rebound in employment among seniors since the falloff in 2020 that was a consequence of the pandemic and the lockdowns. Employment hasn't recovered all the way back to its pre-pandemic levels, but I think it's about three-fourths of that level. Danny, is that right?

**Heil:** That's about right. We certainly see the recovery among younger people; they are back to their pre-COVID levels. But among seniors, particularly around the age of sixty-five or so, you do see a drop-off. But the important thing to remember is that is from a very high base. If you trace employment rates back a decade, the 2023 level is higher than it was in 2016 or 2017. What we are

observing today is that employment trends are remarkably strong relative to recent history.

Incomes are rising over time for those close to retirement. The same can be said for assets. We are planning to write a longer paper that will delve into asset trends over time.

There is certainly some cyclical in income and asset trends depending on economic conditions, but overall, you are seeing the growth continue in a way that suggests today's seniors are doing well and that there is no reason to believe that tomorrow's seniors are going to be worse off.

**Cogan:** We don't directly address how much of a person's pre-retirement income is replaced by Social Security and other forms of retirement income. That is a subject of a separate analysis that we will be doing. But essentially

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***“Social Security benefits do not need to continue increasing annually in real terms in the future.”***



what Danny said is absolutely right. What we're seeing is a substantial amount of income being replaced in retirement years.

**Movroydis:** What types of policy reforms do you think could address the expense of programs for the elderly in the next decade?

**Cogan:** On Social Security, there are two important implications of our work. One is that the extraordinary growth in income sources other than Social Security suggests to us that Social Security benefits do not need to continue increasing annually in real terms in the future. Most people don't know this,

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***“Government would be wise to continue to create incentives to encourage individuals to rely less on the public sector during their retirement years.”***

but the benefits that are promised to future retirees are generally higher, after adjusting for inflation, than those that are received by today's retirees. Those increases have been automatically

taking place since the mid-1970s. Slowing that growth to the rate of inflation is appropriate.

The other implication relates to the distribution of Social Security benefits. Social Security now accounts for only about 18 percent of the \$157,000 mean income among senior households in the upper half of the senior income distribution. So, for them, Social Security has become relatively unimportant. Therefore, some lessening of Social Security benefits and more reliance on other forms of income is appropriate for them.

On the other hand, Social Security still accounts for about 80 percent of benefits received by households in the lower half of the income distribution. So, Social Security remains important for this group. Making Social Security more progressive would be an appropriate policy direction for the program to take.

**Heil:** There is certainly room for reform. Now politically, whether that's popular or not, that's another issue.

I think we should be thinking about policy reforms that boost private savings and labor earnings, which, as we mentioned, have been the two biggest drivers of growth among median-income seniors. Policy makers should be looking to strengthen those trends.

On the labor side, certainly tax policy reforms and deregulation are good places to start.

On the retirement side, there are policies that can be achieved on a bipartisan basis. Recently, Congress passed two different acts that have tried to strengthen some of the defined-contribution retirement programs, the SECURE Act and then the SECURE Act 2.0. Historically, there have been cumbersome regulations that have prevented smaller businesses from offering defined-contribution plans. These laws were intended to liberalize some of the rules, to allow small businesses, in particular, to provide these plans to their employees.

Participation rates, among people who are not quite seniors yet, in defined-contribution plans are plateauing. This suggests that we can do more to encourage people to save. We will see within the next few years whether the SECURE Act and SECURE Act 2.0 will make a substantial difference.

**Cogan:** Over the past forty years, good public policies have created and expanded private retirement-savings vehicles. They've also improved work incentives to allow workers to prepare better for their retirement years and to be less reliant on government programs. Recognizing this, the implication of our work is that government would be wise to continue to create incentives to encourage individuals to rely less on the public sector during their retirement years. If we don't continue to allow private savings and employment to grow, we are going to end up imposing a very large tax on younger households.

**Heil:** The fact that private savings and labor participation rates have grown among seniors over the past forty years is a remarkable success. Meanwhile, the indexing of Social Security in the 1970s to keep up with inflation was more than enough to ensure that seniors maintain a standard of living to which they were accustomed in their pre-retirement years. Our data show these two points. This gives policy makers an opportunity to rethink the way the federal budget looks while making sure seniors continue to experience impressive income gains. ■

### *Special to the Hoover Digest.*



Available from Stanford University Press is ***The High Cost of Good Intentions***, by John F. Cogan. To order, visit [www.sup.org](http://www.sup.org).



# *Putin the Stalinist*

**The end of the Soviet Union promised a new day. Instead, Russia's thousand-year pattern of autocracy re-emerged.**

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***By Norman M. Naimark***

**T**he British historian E. H. Carr wrote that history is a dialogue between past and present. These past months of war in Ukraine have caused me to think more and more about Vladimir Putin in the mirror of Josef Stalin, and Stalin in the mirror of Putin.

I resisted for a very long time the notion that Putin was a Stalin-like figure. However, the similarity between the two of them, the historical dialogue, seems to be growing too powerful to be pushed aside.

I have lived in Putin's prewar Russia. I've worked in the archives of the state and party and talked to friends openly about the pluses and minuses of the regime—a freedom unthinkable in Stalin's time or even today. Three of my books were published in Russian by a small, friendly publishing outfit, all of them openly critical of important parts of Soviet history. Not only did I function well in Moscow—and my stays were mostly in Moscow—but I liked being there, speaking Russian, going to comfortable coffeehouses

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and restaurants, and watching biased but sometimes interesting television programs.

I had my hopes up for a better Russia. Sometimes those hopes would be squelched by current events, but I still felt that one fine day the good guys would win. The end of the Soviet system in 1991 was crucial. By the turn of the century, I was ready for that new day to dawn.

## INSISTENT PARALLELS

I should add that in addition to reading and watching video of Putin's speeches and interviews, I saw him in action at a meeting of the Valdai Discussion Club, a Moscow-based think tank, in Sochi. I confess I was impressed by his ability to speak cogently and comprehensively for hours about a wide variety of

questions. Not that I necessarily agreed with what he said—but he was a forceful speaker, sure of himself and confident, but also subtle

and not without a sense of humor. He was surely better on his feet dealing with questions than most US presidents I have seen in similar situations. He was much better at public speaking and interviews than Stalin, who could be a deadly boring orator and whose interviews were clipped and predictable, though by no means unintelligent.

Stalinist Russia was a scary, bleak place. The terror and purges swept up millions of people. Of course, the population managed to find enjoyment in life, dancing to new and fashionable swing bands, going to corny movies, and reveling in a newly emerging consumer culture that was particularly notable in the immediate post-World War II period. But still: the sheer weight of the Gulag, the executions, the torture, the mass murders, the deportations, and the fear—all promoted by the all-powerful and fearsome leader—were something quite different from the Russia I enjoyed visiting.

But Stalin and Putin have many of the same characteristics, starting with their shared role as leaders of Russia at war. Putin does not wear a military uniform or pose as a generalissimo, but both he and Stalin project powerful images of being in control, even when they may not be, of knowing what they are doing (even when they don't), of leading their respective armies, and of honoring the service of their military subordinates. They both routinely replace generals who fail to produce victories and rebuke subordinates who fail to supply the

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***Motifs of sacrifice for the fatherland—and the honor of shedding blood for the greater good of the Russian people—loom large with both men.***





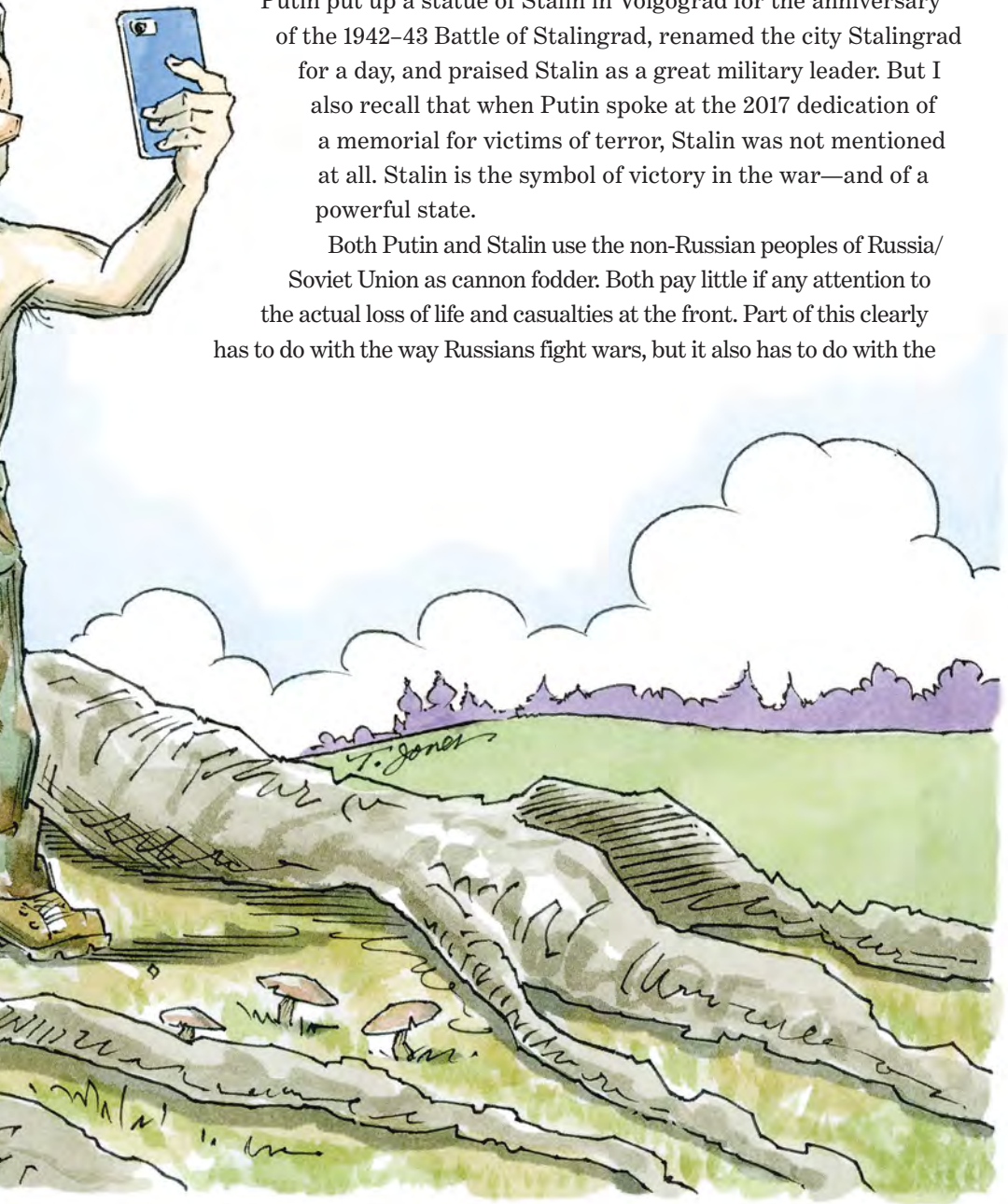
[Taylor Jones—*for the Hoover Digest*]



military with what it needs in men and materiel. Putin's injunctions to military valor resonate with Stalin's own wartime appearances before the people and the troops. The motifs of sacrifice for the fatherland and the honor of shedding blood for the greater good of the Russian people loom large with both.

Putin put up a statue of Stalin in Volgograd for the anniversary of the 1942–43 Battle of Stalingrad, renamed the city Stalingrad for a day, and praised Stalin as a great military leader. But I also recall that when Putin spoke at the 2017 dedication of a memorial for victims of terror, Stalin was not mentioned at all. Stalin is the symbol of victory in the war—and of a powerful state.

Both Putin and Stalin use the non-Russian peoples of Russia/Soviet Union as cannon fodder. Both pay little if any attention to the actual loss of life and casualties at the front. Part of this clearly has to do with the way Russians fight wars, but it also has to do with the





***SEEMS FAMILIAR: Russian President Vladimir Putin examines a flag at a factory in Ivanovo, Russia, that shows Josef Stalin and Vladimir Lenin in profile. Stalin's and Putin's views of history harmonize, as do many of their personal characteristics.*** [Mikhail Svetlov—Getty Images]

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leaders themselves, and their lack of concern for minimizing casualties. We could add to this other parallels between the way Stalin fought World War II and Putin the war in Ukraine: the heavy use of artillery and tanks, the attempts to wear down the enemy with updated trench warfare, and the bombardment of civilian targets as if they were the same as military objectives.

The war crimes and crimes against humanity committed today by Russian troops in Ukraine are reflected in the Soviet World War II advances against the Germans in Eastern Europe, in Germany, and in Berlin, the heart of the beast itself, as Soviet posters portrayed it. Regardless of one's justified contempt for the Nazi regime, it's worth remembering the hundreds of thousands of raped German women and girls, the innocent German civilians who were attacked and murdered as they tried to escape the Soviet advance, and the widespread pillaging of food, household goods, and other property, all of which have also been widely reported in Ukraine.

This, of course, is not necessarily the direct result of Putin's or Stalin's leadership. But it is the indirect result. Neither seems to exhibit much empathy or pity for their enemies or innocent victims. Neither develops policies that might limit damage to schools, hospitals, or maternity wards, much less the civilian housing complexes that get destroyed in indiscriminate bombing and shelling. Both are intensely aware of how important shaping the Russian side of the story—really, the PR about the respective wars—is to public support for the war and their political objectives. They both use religion and the church to bless their military campaigns. Religious, cultural, and historical motifs combine with political ones.

## IDEOLOGICAL WAR

Neither Stalin nor Putin invented Russian “military-patriotic education,” but both rely on its tenets—martial bearing, nationalism, patriotism, athletic prowess, and the use of weapons—to promote the military among Russian youth, men, and women. Youth in particular are the objects of intense training and the inculcation of militarist characteristics, such as incessant saluting, following orders, marching in step, and not questioning authority.

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***Ukrainians are not Russians and don't want to be Russians. That's precisely why they are dangerous for Moscow.***

Another part of this Stalin-Putin story is their respective thinking about the Soviet/Russian empire and Ukraine. Both adhere to the proposition that Ukraine is integral to the strength of empire, be it Soviet or Russian. Yet to both Stalin and Putin, Ukraine is the little brother, “Little Russia,” as it was known under the czars. Russians should see themselves as superior to Ukrainians: bigger, stronger, more powerful, more central to the imperial project than the Ukrainians.

But Ukrainians are not Russians and do not want to be Russians. That is precisely why they are dangerous for Moscow. Especially after the forcible incorporation of western Ukraine in 1945, they pulled towards the West. But even in a previous era, the period of the Holodomor, the death famine of 1932–33, Stalin constantly asserted that the Poles would use the Ukrainians to destroy the Soviet Union. Putin now claims that Ukraine is being controlled by the West, that the leaders are nothing but marionettes of the United States.

Putin's accusation is remarkably similar to the language Stalin used to talk about Polish ambitions in Ukraine. Then, the Ukrainians were all

“Petliurites”—after Symon Petliura, who had been a major figure in trying to establish an independent Ukrainian state during the Russian Civil War. Now the Ukrainians, in addition to being called Nazis, neo-Nazis, and fascists, are “Banderites”—followers of Stepan Bandera, who had an on-again, off-again relationship with the Nazis during World War II in the name of founding an independent Ukraine.

Interesting, too, is the psychological reaction of both Putin and Stalin to the Ukrainians. The Ukrainians are ungrateful turncoats, people who refuse to admit how much the Russians had done for them, how they had been protected and nurtured by Moscow. Only to turn on their big brothers!

Stalin’s and Putin’s views of history also harmonize. In their shared view, the medieval principdom of Kyivan Rus was Russian, not Ukrainian. The

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***Putin would agree with Stalin: “The state demands that we are pitiless.”***

1654 treaty of Pereyaslav demonstrated the readiness of the Russian empire to protect the

Ukrainians against their Polish enemies. It was certainly not an agreement between equals with mutual benefits, as the Ukrainians assert. And for both Stalin and Putin, the Holodomor was not genocide at all. Stalin denied the existence of an all-Soviet Union famine altogether, while Putin admits there was a famine but not that Ukraine suffered in particular. For both Stalin and Putin, World War II was above all a victory of the Great Russian People. Ukrainians may have fought bravely, but there were too many Banderites who sullied the reputation of the Ukrainians in the war.

## **PRIVATE AND “PITILESS”**

Finally, the biographies of Stalin and Putin have some eerie similarities. Both had hardscrabble, lower-class backgrounds. Stalin had a religious background; Putin did not, though he seems, maybe genuinely, to have taken up Orthodoxy in recent years. Both rose to prominent positions by being responsible bureaucrats, Putin in Anatoly Sobchak’s Leningrad city organization, Stalin in the early Bolshevik party (in which, recent biographies have made clear, he was more than the messenger boy described by Trotsky).

In their rise to supreme power, both maneuvered skillfully to oust opponents and potential rivals. Both were effective in internal political wrangling. Stalin murdered many tens of thousands of real and potential opponents. Putin may well have been behind the murder of a number of his; the scale is clearly very different. But he would agree with Stalin’s justification: “The state demands that we are pitiless.”

Both leaders are intensely private, revealing little of their family lives. Both seem to be friendless. Both have a security mania and are generously endowed with streaks of paranoia and fear regarding the people around them, as well as the outside world.

Both leaders relied heavily on the Russian secret police in their rise to power and in maintaining their supreme positions. Stalin had his OGPU and NKVD, Putin the KGB and the FSB. Stalin himself was not a secret policeman, as was Putin, but he might as well have been. Both understood the power of the Chekist “Sword and Shield” to control all of society. According to Andrei Soldatov, a Russian émigré investigative journalist, Putin has used the FSB to solidify his position in occupied Ukraine, as well as internally. Similarly, Stalin used the NKVD to help him control Eastern Europe, as well as the Soviet Union.

In the end, both Stalin and Putin are essentially realists in their foreign policy. They both have ideological lenses through which they see the world, but ultimately they perform a careful weighing of national interest. And they see the pursuit of that national interest as forwarding their own interests.

Stalin and Putin make mistakes. Stalin’s was in thinking that Hitler would not attack. Putin’s biggest mistake, in my view, was attacking Ukraine. Their calculations can be seen as tainted by paranoia, fearfulness, and xenophobia—imbalances, in short, that made clear-eyed realism impossible. ■

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# *Between East and West*

**Whoever wins the war, Ukraine will remain a buffer state on Europe's borderlands. The country's future points to "fortified neutrality."**

***By Jakub Grygiel***

**T**ragedically for its people, Ukraine is on the path of Russia's persistent westward push and thus it serves as the West's rampart. Ukraine is the *antemurale* of Europe. With Ukraine under Moscow's domination, Europe is directly threatened and likely to be torn by even deeper divisions among its nations, which are likely to pursue divergent approaches toward Russia. With Ukraine as an independent and strong state, the West has a buffer on its eastern frontier, protecting it from the assaults of Muscovite power.

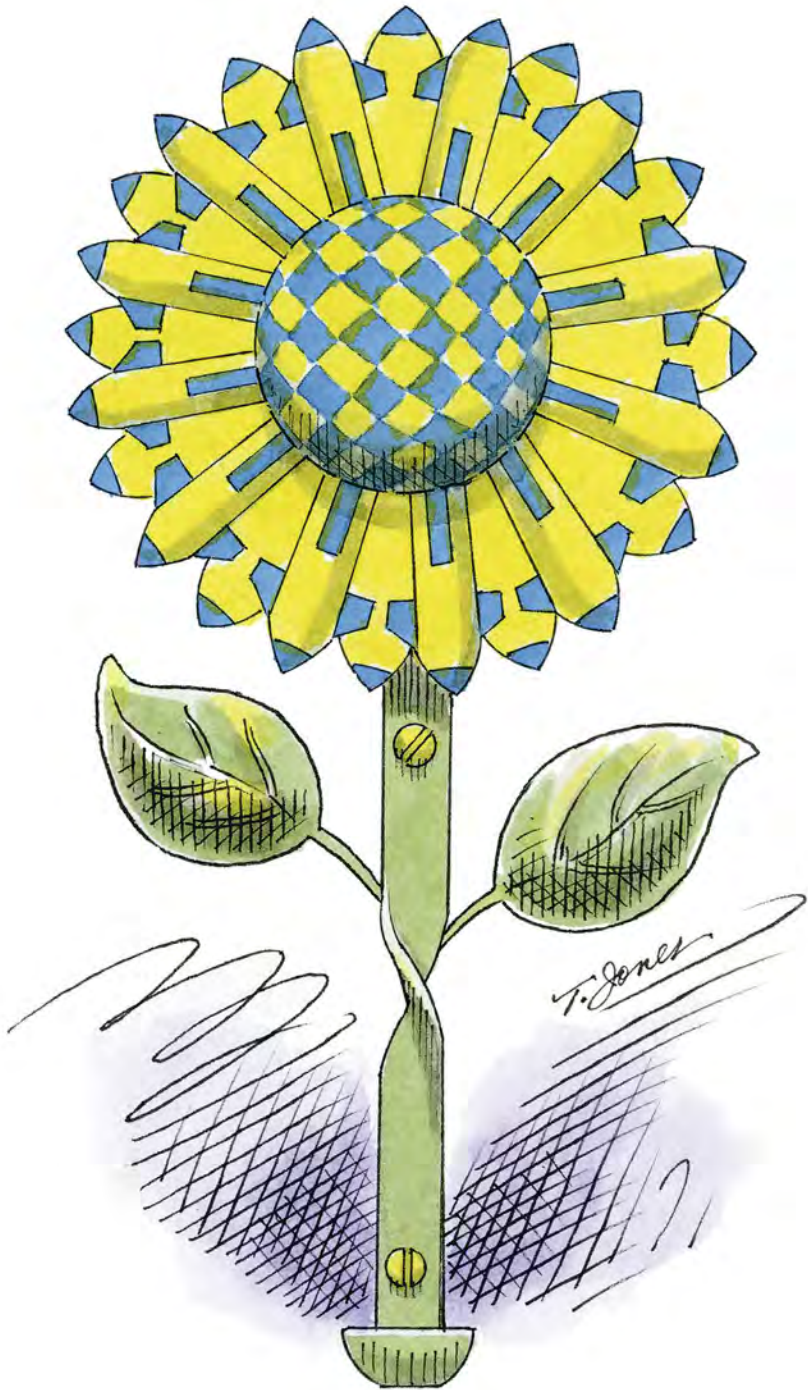
The key question, then, concerns the nature of the connection between Europe and Ukraine. Assuming that Ukraine survives as an

## ***Key points***

- » There is very little chance Kyiv will join the EU and NATO in the near future.
- » Ukraine would need to settle "territorial disputes, including irredentist claims," to be considered for NATO.
- » The best Ukrainians can do is to carve themselves a space of liberty between the competing great powers.

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[Taylor Jones—for the *Hoover Digest*]



***MORE TO COME: Ukraine's president, Volodymyr Zelensky, left, and Odesa Mayor Gennadiy Trukhanov, right, survey damage from a Russian missile strike last summer.*** [Ukrainian Presidential Office]

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independent state at the end of the current war, what should its relationship be with the West, in particular the institutions of NATO and the EU underpinning it?

Despite pervasive rhetorical support for Ukraine's EU and NATO membership, there is very little chance that Kyiv will join these institutions in the

near future. The European Union is too unwieldy to accept such a large country, one of the largest agricultural producers in the world. Were Ukraine

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***Ukraine is likely to remain neither anchored in Western institutions nor subjugated in the Russian sphere.***

to join the EU, it would create massive problems for the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), one of the oldest EU policies, which gives money to its members according to the size of arable land. Ukraine's arable land is as big as all of Italy, and thus Kyiv would automatically become the main recipient of CAP funds, competing with farmers in the rest of Europe.

Moreover, Ukrainian agricultural products would flood Europe, displacing local producers, something that already happened briefly late last year when Ukraine redirected its grain exports to its Western neighbors as its

usual markets became less accessible because of the war. Hence, while now there may be support for Ukraine's EU membership among Western political leaders, the politics of accession would be extremely difficult and divisive. In brief, EU membership for Ukraine is highly unlikely.

NATO is equally hard to join. Even though Ukraine has now contributed more to the defense of Europe than the vast majority of current NATO members, to join NATO the applicants have to fulfill several requirements. A particularly difficult one for Ukraine will be to resolve its territorial disputes, even though they are not Kyiv's fault. As the 1995 "Study on NATO Enlargement" clarified, "States which have ethnic disputes or external territorial disputes, including irredentist claims, or internal jurisdictional disputes must settle those disputes by peaceful means in accordance with OSCE [Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe] principles. Resolution of such disputes would be a factor in determining whether to invite a state to join the alliance."

One of the effects of Russia's war against Ukraine since 2014 is that it has created hard-to-resolve territorial disputes. In order to end them, Ukraine would have to either reconquer the lost lands (including Crimea) or give up its sovereignty over them, ceding them to Moscow. Either option is difficult to pursue for Kyiv militarily or politically, likely resulting in a long-term territorial problem with Russia. Consequently, it is highly unlikely that NATO members would be willing to accept Ukraine into the alliance with this festering problem.

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***For Ukraine, the best solution is remaining nonaligned but with sufficient arms, a defensible space, and a viable economy.***

It may be desirable to have Kyiv in NATO, just as it is very beneficial to have Finland as a new member, but it is also hard to conceive at the moment.

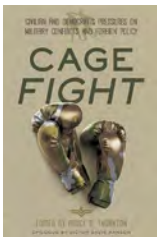
The more likely outcome is that Ukraine will remain a buffer state: neither anchored in Western institutions nor subjugated in the Russian sphere. There are reasons to believe that this is a feasible outcome because the great powers—Russia, Turkey, and the Western alliance—around Ukraine may be interested in such a status as preferable to a clear alignment one way or another. Turkey and the West do not want Ukraine to fall under Moscow's domination, for moral but also geostrategic reasons. At the same time, Russia has obviously demonstrated that it will use protracted brutal force to seek

Ukrainian subservience. And, as mentioned above, the West is unlikely to extend its economic and security mantle to the Wild Fields of the Dnieper basin. This “either-or” geopolitical dynamic—but with neither side willing or capable of fully controlling the area—points to a stalemate of sorts, resulting in Ukraine in neither camp.

This may, of course, be disappointing to Ukrainians who have expressed a desire to join Western institutions and have clearly incurred heavy sacrifices to avoid Russian rule. But all Ukrainians can do is to carve for themselves a space of liberty between the competing great powers.

Russia will, of course, not give up its imperial aspiration to control Ukraine. It will remain an enduring power, seeking to rebuild its status and possessions on its western frontier, especially as the Asiatic region becomes less permissive with a growing China. Hence, for Ukraine, the best solution is a “fortified neutrality,” remaining nonaligned but with sufficient arms, a defensible space, and a viable economy to deter and, if necessary, defeat further Russian offensives. The role of the West and of Turkey, therefore, is to arm Ukraine not just for the ongoing operations against Russian forces but for the long term, creating a militarily robust, geopolitically independent, and economically confident state on Europe’s frontier. ■

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# *Putin Plays the Long Game*

**The place of NATO in Europe—for that matter, the place of democracy everywhere. Everything depends on Ukraine.**

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***By Hy Rothstein***

**T**he future of NATO, in almost every dimension imaginable, depends on the outcome of the war in Ukraine. That outcome is unknown. While there is reason to be optimistic, events, and especially wars, can take unanticipated paths and generate unexpected results. Moreover, underestimating Russian leader Vladimir Putin's willingness to kill as many Ukrainians as possible—and to throw hundreds of thousands of Russian men into the fray against Ukrainian bullets until there are no more Ukrainian bullets left—would be a big mistake. Politicians and politics change constantly in NATO's liberal democracies, but in his own mind, Putin is staying forever. Time and math may be on Russia's side.

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***Time and math may be on Russia's side.***

Many experts have suggested that the invasion will be one of history's greatest geostrategic blunders. Putin clearly intended to show that Russia's modernized military would present a formidable capability against a country that had no right

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***Hy Rothstein (US Army, Ret.) is a former senior lecturer at the Naval Postgraduate School in Monterey.***



***DUTY CALLS: A Ukrainian soldier training in England gives a salute in February 2023, one year after the invasion began. NATO takes the position that the West will support Ukraine “as long as it takes,” but there are limits to the amount of materiel and money Western countries can send.*** [UK Ministry of Defense]

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to exist, and that the West, as it had done in 2014 after the annexation of Crimea and the seizing of territory in eastern Ukraine, would respond feebly. The outcome was very different. The war revealed Russian military incompetence as well as the defects of a corrupt, authoritarian political system. The Ukrainians fought and kept the Russian invaders from entering Kyiv. Putin’s plan for a quick and easy victory was shattered. Even Henry Kissinger, who for decades cautioned against Ukraine’s membership in NATO, concluded that “Ukraine is a major state in Central Europe for the first time in modern history,” and that a peace process should link Ukraine to NATO.

Putin generated the opposite of what he intended. More important, NATO, having struggled for more than two decades to reach a shared view with Moscow, finally acknowledged Putin’s expansionist agenda in Europe, and as a result came together with a common purpose to arm Ukraine and stop Russia.

## STEP FORWARD

NATO's initial reluctance to assist Kyiv in fighting Russia turned into a massive military assistance program. The courageous actions of President Volodymyr Zelensky and Ukrainian fighters, contrasted with the barbaric, genocidal actions of Russian leaders and their troops, certainly helped to solidify NATO's strong support.

During a visit to Kyiv earlier this year, President Biden expressed Western resolve and unveiled an additional \$460 million US weapons package, for a total of \$32 billion

in aid since Russia's

invasion began. The West's determination

to support Ukraine has

been remarkable, though

gradual and measured. Though NATO has not put boots on the ground,

Western leaders' words and deeds have made the war in Ukraine their war, too, and their commitment brings its own risks.

After Biden's address, Putin delivered his own message of undying commitment to the fight. He addressed the Russian parliament, stressing the stakes: "This is a time of radical, irreversible change in the entire world, of crucial historical events that will determine the future of our country and our people, a time when every one of us bears a colossal responsibility." In what sounded like a wartime speech, Putin discarded the initial justification for his limited "special military operation" to "demilitarize and de-Nazify" Ukraine and recast the conflict as a war against Western civilization. Putin has now framed the conflict as imperial America and its allies launching the war despite Russian efforts for peace. The West, according to Putin, has become an existential threat—Russia against the West.

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***NATO finally acknowledged Putin's expansionist agenda in Europe, and as a result came together.***

## DEATH BY A THOUSAND CUTS

The second year of the war will likely be more consequential than the first.

Moscow seems to have gotten smarter. Strategic decisions are starting

to make military sense. The partial mobilization of reservists that Putin

ordered in September 2022 strengthened Russian forces at the front. The

redeployment of forces to eastern Ukraine and the withdrawal of Russian

forces from Kherson in November saved units from destruction and made

them available for action elsewhere. Thousands of troops are receiving more

substantial training in Russia and Belarus. During the first year of the war,

Ukraine's military achieved considerable success when Russia's forces were at their weakest and its leadership was at its poorest. Now the Ukrainian army should expect to fight a better-led and -trained opponent.

Russia has also perpetuated a methodical bombing campaign against Ukraine's electrical system, aiming to turn the war into a struggle for survival for Ukrainian civilians. This campaign has not proved decisive so far, but like most strategic bombing campaigns, it imposes direct and indirect military costs. For example, modern military air defense, command and control, and intelligence-gathering systems all run on electricity. While generators can fill the gap, making that transition degrades these systems' performance. Moreover, the heat produced by generators is easily detected

by Russian intelligence, facilitating further targeting. The bombing campaign also affects the Ukrainian weapons and ammunition industry that

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***This year, the Ukrainian army is fighting a better-led and -trained opponent.***

depends on electricity, as does much of the rail system that moves war materiel around the country. NATO is helping Ukraine repair the grid, but from the Russian perspective, this is good news—the repairs consume resources that cannot be used to support fighting at the front.

Casualty figures are notoriously inaccurate. US intelligence estimates put the number of total casualties after the first year of fighting at 100,000 for the Russians and 100,000 for the Ukrainians, roughly comparable for both sides. Russia has already mobilized 300,000 additional troops and routinely recruits and trains 250,000 annually. So far, Ukraine has managed to replenish its army relatively effectively, but the manpower arithmetic works to Moscow's advantage. Russia has 3.5 times Ukraine's population. Russia can lose twice as many soldiers as Ukraine and still have a manpower advantage. Russia can likely do what Russia has always done—use sheer numbers to win in the end.

The math on ammunition and weapons is also complicated. Ukraine is firing its Western-supplied 155mm artillery shells faster than they can be manufactured. The same problem exists with other munitions. Russian munitions stockpiles seem to be plentiful, though old. NATO, in part worried about its own war stocks, is investing in ammunition production but it may take until next year to narrow the growing gap.

Even more troubling, Russia is pulling World War II-era T-60 tanks out of storage and sending them to the battlefield; any tank is better than no tank.

Meanwhile, the United States and NATO have large numbers of tanks that are ready to go but are not in Ukrainian hands.

How will the war end? NATO's position seems to be that Western governments will support Ukraine "as long as it takes" to drive Russian forces out of its territory. For all the bold rhetoric, it's still uncertain how far NATO can go. There are limits to the amount of materiel and money Western countries can send. And while Biden may want to support Ukraine for the long haul, that could abruptly change, given that there is opposition to doing much more to help Ukraine. Leadership changes in Europe could also undercut support for Kyiv.

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***Russia is pulling World War II-era tanks out of storage. Any tank is better than no tank.***

## THE LARGER STAKES

The first year of the war found NATO joining to help Ukraine beat back a poorly trained and poorly led Russian army. The second year may not be favoring NATO and Ukraine, especially if Russia's learning curve outpaces NATO's ability to get weapons into Ukrainian hands. Ukraine can sustain its fight only with help from the West, and that help has generally been too little and too unpredictable. What brought NATO together in 2022 may come undone in 2023.

Something larger than Ukraine's existence is at stake. Putin's power is based on historical fictions, the silencing of political opponents, and the outlawing of language contrary to official views. He has surrounded the Ukraine invasion with false-

hoods: "de-Nazification,"

NATO's drive to deny

Russia its rightful place

in the world, Ukrainians

killing their Russian-speaking citizens, Ukraine's lack of status as a legitimate state, and so on. Hundreds of thousands of Ukrainians will die defending Ukraine. If Russia wins, the truth dies too.

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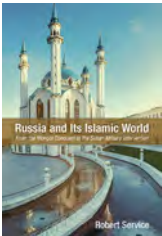
***Ukrainians are dying to defend their land. If Russia wins, the truth dies too.***

That is why the outcome transcends what happens to Ukraine. A Russian victory would strengthen tyrants whose visions of geopolitics render any concept of a liberal democratic order obsolete. The war is about the future of a democracy, the principle of self-rule, and the rule of law. A Ukrainian victory would rejuvenate sleeping democracies.



NATO must end the practice of trickling support into Ukraine to avoid defeat but not to enable Ukraine to crush the invaders. Putin still expects Western resolve to eventually crumble, or military stockpiles to become depleted, negating NATO's capacity to provide material assistance. Russia can, as in the past, use time and sheer numbers to prevail. If Putin gets what he wants, NATO, democracy, and the rule of law will be diminished and recovering will be difficult and costly. ■

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# *The Alliance Strikes Back*

**When Russia attacked Ukraine, NATO seemed just short of irrelevant. So, Vladimir Putin gambled. He wasn't the first dictator to bet the West would appease him.**

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**By Andrew Roberts**

**T**here is no more iron commandment in politics and international relations than the law of unintended consequences. Vladimir Putin intended his invasion of Ukraine to strike a proxy blow at NATO, exposing its rifts and leaving it crushed and humiliated after his blitzkrieg on Kyiv. Instead, the alliance is at its strongest, most focused, and soon will be at its most territorially extensive.

As recently as November 2019, French President Emmanuel Macron declared NATO “brain dead,” Germany was putting such anemic amounts of money into her defense that her reservists were training with broom handles instead of rifles, and Sweden and Finland pursued separate defense policies outside NATO with no active plans to join.

The West's humiliation during its scuttle from Afghanistan in late August 2021 was of course primarily the fault of the Biden administration, but the other nations of the coalition were humiliated in America's wake and felt it. Small

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*Andrew Roberts is the Roger and Martha Mertz Visiting Fellow at the Hoover Institution and a member of Hoover's Working Group on the Role of Military History in Contemporary Conflict. He is the host of a Hoover Institution podcast, **Secrets of Statecraft with Andrew Roberts**.*

wonder that Putin and Xi Jinping thought it an opportune moment further to test NATO with the invasion of a European country, albeit the latter did stipulate that it was not to happen until after the Winter Olympics in Beijing.

It is extraordinary how often in history dictators have assumed weakness and appeasement will be the automatic response on the part of democratic Western countries. There is something endemic in dictatorships that, because they entirely forbid them in their own societies, energetic debate and dissen-

sion in democracies are regularly mistaken for internal weakness and even stasis. The idea that street demonstrations,

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### ***NATO has been revealed as a living, vigorous, righteous entity.***

verbally violent TV and press altercations, angry parliamentary exchanges, and so on, might actually be positive signs of a healthy democracy and a strong country does not occur to foreign dictators like Putin and Xi. They therefore make entirely incorrect deductions.

History is littered with examples of dictators underestimating the West's resolve, from Josef Stalin blockading Berlin in 1948 and giving Kim Il Sung the green light to invade South Korea two years later, to Nikita Khrushchev believing he could take advantage of a young president to install nuclear weapons in Cuba in 1962, to Saddam Hussein assuming he could keep Kuwait in 1990 and ignore fourteen UN resolutions in 2003. Putin and Xi made exactly the same false assumption over the West's response to the Russian invasion of Ukraine last year. (And Xi might well yet again, should China ever invade Taiwan, with more devastating consequences even than we have seen in Ukraine.)

Had NATO failed the test in Ukraine and failed to supply President Volodymyr Zelensky with the intelligence and materiel he needed, it would have devastated the alliance. Instead, NATO has been revealed as a living, vigorous, righteous entity fighting—necessarily vicariously due to the restrictions imposed by mutual assured destruction—for the right of Ukrainian independence and integrity, and the wider cause of national self-determination.

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### ***NATO is carefully and so far remarkably successfully acting as the arsenal of democracy.***

Finland and Sweden are finally doing what they should have decades ago, and defense budgets are soaring across the alliance.

Far from being “brain dead,” therefore, NATO is carefully and so far remarkably successfully acting as the arsenal of democracy, punishing

Putin's hubris with supplies of ever more lethal weaponry to Kyiv. It is rare in history for voluntary international organizations to become utterly indispensable, but that is the case with NATO today, and it is all down to Vladimir Putin ignoring the iron law of unintended consequences. ■

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# *“We Kept Feeding the Shark”*

**Hoover fellow Matthew Pottinger reflects on the hope—in his words, “almost a religious faith”—that if only the West treated the country as a partner, China would become pluralistic and peaceful.**

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***By Ken Moriyasu***

**F**or many years, the West believed that more engagement with China would fundamentally transform the way Beijing governs. “We saw a baby shark and thought that we could transform it into a dolphin,” former US deputy national security adviser Matt Pottinger told *Nikkei Asia* in an interview. “We kept feeding the shark and the shark got bigger and bigger. And now we’re dealing with a formidable great white.”

The West should have been heeding what Chinese President Xi Jinping was saying internally, Pottinger says. In a 2013 speech to Chinese Communist Party members, Xi said Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels were still correct, that capitalism will inevitably perish, and socialism will triumph.

Those comments contributed to the decision by Pottinger’s former boss, President Donald Trump, to switch America’s strategy toward China, he said. The administration of President Joe Biden has kept to Trump’s path.

Pottinger, now a distinguished visiting fellow at the Hoover Institution, sat down with *Nikkei* in Tokyo.

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*Matthew Pottinger is a distinguished visiting fellow at the Hoover Institution. Ken Moriyasu is a diplomatic correspondent for Nikkei Asia.*





***CAUTION: Former deputy national security adviser Matthew Pottinger testifies during a House Select Committee on the Chinese Communist Party hearing in February 2023. Pottinger points out how Chinese rulers carefully revealed their plans to avoid opposition from democratic states.*** [Graeme Sloan—SIPA]

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***Ken Moriyasu, Nikkei Asia:*** China is providing less and less information to the outside world. Journalists are denied visas, and Japanese businessmen are being arrested. Why is China doing this, and where is the country headed?

***Matthew Pottinger:*** Beijing's grand strategy, which they have laid out in important speeches and in the fourteenth Five Year Plan (2021–25), is one of achieving almost total self-reliance for technology and food supplies. At the same time, the strategy is to make the rest of the world increasingly dependent on China for high technology. They want to use that for coercive leverage.

If you look at some of Xi's speeches, he has different messages for external audiences and for the internal Chinese Communist Party audience. The Chinese government goes to great lengths to conceal his words from foreign audiences and to try to substitute that with softer messages. Dual messaging is a fundamental quality of that regime.

The fundamental tension in Beijing's relations—not only with the United States but with Japan, with industrialized democracies around the world—is inherent in Beijing's ambitions and strategy. What happened gradually over Xi's first decade in power was that he revealed, card by card, slowly, what that strategy really was. It was not so much US policies that created this tension,

but US understanding of the actual strategy of the communist regime that led to a counterstrategy by the United States and other industrialized democracies.

One of his most important speeches was on January 5, 2013. In this speech, he said that Marx and Engels are still correct, that capitalism will inevitably perish from the Earth, and that socialism will triumph. On socialism, he's not talking about a Scandinavian model. This is a single-party dictatorship with

one core leader.

In another important speech, in late 2012, Xi told the story of the collapse of the Soviet Union. He said the profound lesson for the Chinese

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***“It was not so much US policies that created this tension, but US understanding of the actual strategy of the communist regime.”***

Communist Party is that the core leader must control the tools of dictatorship, meaning unambiguous, full control of information, propaganda, ideology, data, the economy, and the security apparatus. The next ten years was the story of Xi implementing what he signaled in those speeches.

The 2012 speech leaked much earlier, so I was aware of some of it. But the 2013 speech was made public, and only in the Chinese language, only in 2019, six years after he delivered that speech. I remember still being in the White House when I read that speech for the first time, and I felt that this was an amazing road map to Xi's worldview and to the goals of his governance. And I think that's turned out to be true.

**Moriyasu:** What were President Trump's reactions to those insights?

**Pottinger:** Until then, the collective strategies and policies of free countries toward China was one of changing China into a more liberal system. The irony was, in a funny way, it was a regime-change strategy. Some people refer to it as peaceful evolution, but at its heart was a core belief, almost a religious faith, in the idea that engagement would fundamentally transform govern-

nance in China.

The Chinese Communist Party did very careful homework to study how to avoid the fate of the Soviet Communist Party. And it did a very good job of pre-

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***“The Chinese Communist Party did very careful homework to study how to avoid the fate of the Soviet Communist Party.”***

tending and fooling foreign interlocutors, particularly policy elites and wealthy businessmen, that it wanted to transform into a more liberal system. This was

the great sleight of hand, the great magic trick, that Beijing was able to pull off where internally, the Communist Party knew that it would never change its fundamental nature and the single-party system. But it sent deceptive signals through a very elaborate con to outside interlocutors that it wanted to and might actually soon transform itself into a more pluralistic system.

We saw a baby shark and thought that we could transform it into a

dolphin over time, to become a friendly sort of system. Instead, what we did was we kept feeding the shark and the shark got bigger and bigger and bigger and bigger. And now we're dealing with a formidable great white.

With a shark you put up a shark cage. The shark doesn't take it personally. It bumps into the cage. It respects those barriers.

**Moriyasu:** What does this mean for America's allies, like Japan?

**Pottinger:** An Asia dominated by China will be a very unpleasant place for Japan. Japan's mission has two parts.

One is to ensure that China does not acquire coercive leverage over Japan's economy. Its other mission is to acquire sufficient capability to deter China from military adventures in the region, starting with an attack on Taiwan.

An attack on Taiwan would be a grave, some would say existential, threat to Japanese sovereignty. Japan has a major role to play in demonstrating to Beijing that an attack on Taiwan would be a fatal misstep for Xi and the Chinese Communist Party. ■

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# *The Meaning of Taiwan*

**Defending Taiwan isn't just about defending territory. It's about the fate of the democratic world.**

**By Miles Maochun Yu**

In the seventy-four years since the founding of the People's Republic of China, its leaders have always seen the Republic of China in Taiwan as a thorn in their side. The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) has wished for nothing more than to remove this thorn and fulfill its vision of communist revolution. During the Cold War, Beijing couched these ambitions in the language of “liberating” Taiwan. Now it strikes chords of national unity and sings the new propaganda line of unification of the motherland.

## **Key points**

- » The Republic of China is a truly open society in the Chinese-speaking world, embracing liberty, pluralism, and self-determination. Beijing sees this as a threat.
- » Japan, Australia, South Korea, the Philippines, and even NATO insist that what matters to Taiwan's defense matters to theirs, too.
- » Russia's invasion of Ukraine has galvanized support for Taiwan.

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*Miles Maochun Yu is the Robert Alexander Mercer Visiting Fellow at the Hoover Institution. He is a participant in Hoover's Working Group on the Role of Military History in Contemporary Conflict and Hoover's project on China's Global Sharp Power.*



***KEEPING WATCH: A girl views an exhibit aboard a Taiwanese warship in Kaohsiung. The United States continues to commit to Taiwan's defense through the Taiwan Relations Act and a series of executive orders and policy statements.*** [Annabelle Chih—Getty Images]

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But in those seventy-four years, the Republic of China has undergone a revolution of its own: a revolution of freedom establishing a truly open society in the Chinese-speaking world, embracing liberty, pluralism, and self-determination. Because of its values, its geography, and its centrality to global trade, this beacon of freedom in East Asia has emerged from its humble beginnings to become a linchpin in the international order. Defending Taiwan, therefore, has become a global endeavor. Ensuring its security is essential not only for the United States, the Indo-Pacific region, and Europe, but for the propagation of democracy worldwide.

## **DEFENDERS**

The United States, the world's superpower since World War II, has always seen Taiwan as a bulwark against communism; defending it now is as important as defending West Berlin was in 1948 and 1961. Hence, Washington resolutely opposes any military invasion of the island. Even since the termination of their Mutual Defense Treaty in 1980, the United States has continued to commit to Taiwan's defense through the Taiwan Relations Act and a series of executive orders and policy statements. That neither side of the Taiwan



Strait is allowed to use force to change the status quo, and that both sides of the strait must endorse any prospective settlement, have been central tenets of trilateral relations among Washington, Taipei, and Beijing since the 1970s.

There is no strategic ambiguity in US policy: every American president since Jimmy Carter has left no doubt that he would use military force to stop the Chinese Communist Party's invasion of Taiwan. As the CCP has accelerated its military preparations and intensified its rhetoric, the current president, Joe Biden, has remained unequivocal in his vows for Taiwan's defense through military intervention, so central is the island to American interests.

Other Indo-Pacific nations have also prioritized Taiwan's security. Leaders of both Japan and Australia have insisted that what matters to Taiwan's defense matters to theirs, too. The Philippine government, in dispute with China over territorial waters in the South China Sea, also casts a wary eye on the CCP's ambitions and is determined to stand with its American ally.

To that end, Manila has granted crucial basing rights to the US military on several strategic islands close to Taiwan

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### ***The defense of Taiwan has become a global endeavor.***

near the Bashi Channel and Taiwan Strait. South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol has stated that the Taiwan problem is by no means regional, but global.

Europe is also keenly concerned. The leaders of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization—whose primary mission is European security—assert that Taiwan's defense should also be one of NATO's obligations. NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg has repeatedly stated that Taiwan's security is linked to NATO's security. At a time when the CCP's military threats are in full swing, Stoltenberg has met several times with Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida to discuss Taiwan's security. Josep Borrell, the chief of foreign affairs for the European Union, also published an article in April proposing that the navies of EU countries send warships on strategic patrols in the Taiwan Strait in demonstration of the EU's commitment to the island's defense. In recent years, legislators and politicians from other important EU countries, including France, Germany, Lithuania, the Czech Republic, and Poland, have also visited Taiwan in solidarity. Whatever appeasement rhetoric that has managed to escape the lips of European leaders, such as French President Emmanuel Macron, has been criticized in European public forums.

These nations have all been galvanized by the Russian invasion of Ukraine. Beijing's threats share Vladimir Putin's logic of aggression. Formerly great empires, Russia and China are inspired by revanchist dreams

of their once-unified nations. This logic of aggression disregards the sovereignty and independence of neighboring countries that happen to share linguistic and cultural traditions with the aggressor. If this irredentist worldview is not defeated, world peace cannot be guaranteed. From this point of view, defending Taiwan's democracy is undoubtedly of universal significance.

The CCP, despite its reputation for shrewdness, has also inadvertently unified the democracies of the world by making clear that its conflict against Taiwan is only the first battle in a fight for global domination. Beijing's high-tech military is preparing for global war. Its oceangoing navy, global strike and deterrence force, space command and control capabilities, and acquisition of numerous deep-sea ports worldwide are not all reserved for an invasion of Taiwan. They reflect the CCP's global ambitions. Because of this, the world has become more aware that defending Taiwan is essential to defending against China. No entity has done more than the Chinese Communist Party to globalize the defense of Taiwan.

Yet in many ways, it is only natural that Taiwan's defense be international in scope. Despite its tiny land area, the island is an outsize player in the world economy, crucial to global supply chains for semiconductors and biomedicine. It is located at a strategic chokepoint in key global trade routes abutting the first and second island chains of the Western Pacific, routes that China covets. If Beijing takes Taiwan, it will control commercial traffic through the South China Sea, the East China Sea, and even the Strait of Malacca. This would be an untenable outcome for leaders in Washington, Tokyo, and Seoul, for whom defending Taiwan means safeguarding domestic economies reliant on international trade.

Borrell, the EU's top diplomat, said as much at the European Parliament last spring when he insisted, "Taiwan is clearly part of our geostrategic perimeter to guaran-

tee peace. . . . It is not only for a moral reason that an action against Taiwan must necessarily be rejected. It is also

because it would be, in economic terms, extremely serious for us, because Taiwan has a strategic role in the production of the most advanced

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***Europe has been galvanized by the Russian invasion. Beijing's threats share Russia's logic of aggression.***

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***No entity has done more than the Chinese Communist Party to globalize the defense of Taiwan.***

semiconductors.” If Taipei falls, the world’s most advanced technologies could quickly be at risk.

## LIGHT OF DEMOCRACY

Yet much more than tech is at stake. The preservation of the universal values of freedom and self-determination and the promotion of democracy

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***If Taipei falls, the world’s most advanced technologies could quickly be at risk.***

as a viable political model hinge on the defense of Taiwan. In the Asia-Pacific region, the most important trend of the past several decades has

been that region’s gradual move toward democratization. As several authoritarian regimes of the Cold War collapsed in the wave of protests organized with the support of the United States—beginning in 1986 with the overthrow of the Marcos regime by the “People Power” revolution in the Philippines—countries of the region began to see a future in democracy. South Korea, long under dictatorship, became a strong, proud, modern democratic country.

The people of Taiwan embraced this vision too, making their country a beacon for all of East Asia. The few remaining communist regimes that take their cues from Beijing consider this beacon a threat. The democratic practices of the people of Taiwan also inspire many of the 1.4 billion mainland Chinese under the rule of the Communist Party.

China’s communist dictatorship reckons that its people would be easier to control without the inspiration of their Taiwanese brethren. They know that Taiwanese dreams are the dreams of their own people, too. For this reason, as much as any, the millions in Taiwan who harbor aspirations to live perpetually in freedom’s light will never be alone in their homeland’s defense. ■

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# *Time to Shift out of Neutral*

**India is finding the limits of nonalignment. A strong alliance with the United States offers a better future for New Delhi, particularly as China rises.**

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***By Sumit Ganguly and Dinsha Mistree***

**T**he US-India relationship has not lived up to its potential, and the United States must shoulder some of the blame for this failure.

Successive US administrations ignored India's warnings about negotiating with the Taliban in Afghanistan, and the Biden administration has continued to pursue a relationship with India's rival Pakistan even after US priorities in Asia have shifted toward dealing with China. Washington has also flubbed more routine diplomatic issues such as visa processing, with record backlogs in US consulates in India that only

## ***Key points***

» With US support, India can reassert control over South Asia and emerge as a strong pole of regional order in the Indo-Pacific.

» Even within India's own borders, China represents a threat to New Delhi's strategic autonomy.

» The United States is, and will remain, the only global power capable of playing this supportive role for India.

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*Sumit Ganguly is a visiting fellow at the Hoover Institution and distinguished professor of political science and Tagore Chair in Indian Cultures and Civilizations at Indiana University-Bloomington. Dinsha Mistree is a research fellow at the Hoover Institution, where he manages the Huntington Program on Strengthening US-India Relations.*



***DIALOGUE: US Secretary of State Antony Blinken listens to Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi at the US-India Strategic Partnership Forum in Washington in June. New Delhi's relations with Moscow occupy a shrinking portion of Indian foreign policy, but India continues to harbor misgivings about a genuine partnership with the United States.*** [James Pan—US State Department]

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recently ebbed. And it took more than two years for the US Senate to confirm former Los Angeles mayor Eric Garcetti as ambassador to India, hampering Washington's ability to advance its interests in New Delhi.

For their part, US officials seem to be waking up to the promises—and the limits—of a strong relationship with India. It is unclear whether the same can be said for Indian leaders. New Delhi continues to harbor a variety of misgivings about forging a genuine partnership with the United States. Despite ongoing clashes at the disputed border with China, India has resisted embracing its security partnership with Australia, Japan, and the United States—known as the Quad, or Quadrilateral Security Dialogue—designed to protect the Indo-Pacific from Chinese aggression. At the same time, both Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his foreign minister, Subrahmanyam Jaishankar, have been praised at home for their staunch refusal to condemn the Russian invasion of Ukraine. This stance of neutrality, they have argued, best serves India's interests. Since the invasion in February 2022, India has undoubtedly benefited from a steady supply of cheap Russian oil as the Kremlin has scrambled to secure alternative buyers for its energy commodities. But New Delhi's relations with Moscow occupy a shrinking portion of



Indian foreign policy. In the long run, Russia's growing dependence on China will make it an unreliable partner.

India rightly wants to guarantee itself strategic autonomy as it continues to rise in the world. But such a vision will not be fully realized if India continues to imagine that it can indefinitely play to all sides. Nonalignment may work in specific instances, but it will not serve India well in the long term. Instead, India should forge a strong partnership with the United States. With US support, India can reassert its control over South Asia and emerge as a strong pole of regional order in the Indo-Pacific.

## DATED THINKING

Most of India's concerns about the United States hark back to another era in global politics. New Delhi, it seems, is caught in a time warp. Key members of India's foreign policy elite remain fixated on the United States' relationship with Pakistan during the Cold War and fear its renewal. This belief, although perhaps understandable given the record of US policy toward South Asia, is nevertheless flawed: the United States

and Pakistan have never been and are not now as close as Indian policy makers tend to imagine them to

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***New Delhi, it seems, is caught in a time warp.***

be. It is to the credit of the Trump administration that the United States finally called Pakistan's bluff and terminated all military aid.

Since the US withdrawal from Afghanistan, some in the Biden administration have proposed a limited strategic relationship with Pakistan focused on counterterrorism. But Washington's efforts to secure this new partnership with Islamabad have been halting at best. Although some US foreign policy thinkers still support Pakistan over India, the Beltway establishment is finally recognizing India's primacy in South Asia. There is little reason to believe that the United States, whether under this administration or a future one, would want to resurrect its old alliance with Pakistan, especially if it comes at the expense of a partnership with India.

India's supremacy in its neighborhood is not challenged by Pakistan or the United States but instead by China. In Bangladesh, Nepal, and Sri Lanka, and even within India's own borders, China represents an existential threat to New Delhi's strategic autonomy. Indian and Chinese soldiers have massed along the disputed mountainous border between the two countries, with bloody skirmishes breaking out sporadically. India currently possesses neither the domestic military capabilities (what scholars of international security

refer to as “internal balancing”) nor the foreign partnerships (“external balancing”) to guarantee its security interests and protect its northern borders from the Chinese incursions that have been accelerating since 2019.

Some within India’s security establishment continue to believe that Russia may yet serve as a possible bulwark against China. These expectations stem from the Soviet Union’s role during the Cold War and India’s continuing dependence on Russia for defense equipment and spare parts. Recent developments, however, suggest that this hope is rather fanciful. Russia, preoccupied with its disastrous invasion of Ukraine, has already failed to deliver some military supplies that it had contracted to provide India. And New Delhi’s assiduously cultivated neutral position on the invasion has not prevented Moscow from turning to Beijing, India’s long-term competitor and adversary. Russia has grown only closer to and more dependent on China since Russian President Vladimir Putin ordered the invasion of Ukraine. It simply cannot play the role India wants it to in checking China.

## A WINDOW OF OPPORTUNITY

If India cannot rely on Russia to serve as a counterweight to China, might it be able to turn to other emerging and middle powers? India has strong relationships with several countries in Europe, but these countries don’t have the diplomatic, economic, or military clout to guarantee India’s security interests. India cannot count on European countries or the European Union writ large to assist it in containing China. And its ties with other Asian powers,

including Iran and Japan, are of limited or no use in the context of its competition with China. Likewise, other emerging powers, such as Argentina and

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### ***India’s “external balancing” options—beyond support from the United States—are quite limited.***

Brazil, are unlikely to choose India over China in the coming years. Bluntly stated, India’s external balancing options—beyond support from the United States—are quite limited.

India’s much-vaunted commitment to maintaining its neutrality is no longer a viable option. This approach poorly serves India’s interests in fending off the political and economic advance of China in South Asia and the broader region. Without a reliable external partner that can help India by sharing intelligence, shoring up its grossly inadequate defense capabilities, and cooperating with it in other security areas, New Delhi will remain woefully exposed to Beijing’s machinations.

The United States is and will remain the only global power capable of playing this role. It has a compelling interest in keeping China, its principal challenger and rival, at bay. To that end, its interests clearly dovetail with those of India. Across recent administrations, Washington has made repeated efforts to persuade India that these overlapping interests make it an almost ideal security partner in Asia. In 2016, the Obama administration declared India to be a “major defense partner,” thereby better enabling defense sales. During Donald Trump’s presidency, New Delhi and Washington signed the Basic Exchange and Cooperation Agreement, further strengthening bilateral military cooperation. And under President Joe Biden, the two parties have agreed on the Initiative on Critical and Emerging Technology, which will promote cooperation in high-technology areas.

But what New Delhi urgently needs to realize is that there is a narrow window to secure American support. As the political scientist Ashley Tellis makes clear in his recent essay in *Foreign Affairs*, the United States cannot possibly afford to expend both domestic capital and critical diplomatic resources to continue to meet India’s needs without some form of tangible reciprocity from New Delhi. By limiting its engagement with the United States—while also pursuing deals with US adversaries such as Russia—India is fundamentally compromising its long-term strategic autonomy rather than guaranteeing it.

Equivocal Indian responses to the United States will, almost invariably, lead Washington to simply bolster security ties with other partners and allies, such as Australia and Japan. India, although strategically significant, cannot continue to sit on the fence; to ensure peace and stability in Asia, it has to throw in its lot with the United States. Indian vacillation will convince US officials that despite their best efforts, New Delhi is either incapable of mustering the requisite political will to build a long-term security partnership with Washington or reluctant to do so.

## **BOTH NATIONS BENEFIT**

There is no doubt that both sides have in the past missed vital opportunities to transform the relationship. The exigencies of domestic politics, the imperatives of the Cold War, and fundamentally different policy orientations in both capitals prevented them from forging a strong, enduring partnership. Despite these errors, current circumstances are perhaps the most propitious for the future of the bilateral relationship. New Delhi, now more than ever, needs to shed its hesitation about adopting a pragmatic and forward-looking approach in its dealings with the United States.

The benefits that could accrue to both sides from a strong partnership are considerable. India could build up its domestic defense industrial base,

access the most sophisticated defense technologies, and gradually reduce its dependence on Russia, an increasingly unreliable defense supplier. Most important, closer defense

and security ties with the United States would enable it to ward off the inexorable threat from China.

A closer security partnership could also have significant spillover effects in other arenas. A secure, stable, and confident India would become a more attractive destination for American investment. At a time when the United States is increasingly concerned about the viability of important supply chains, India could become an important manufacturing hub for a variety of components in various industrial products. The United States, in turn, would be able to count on India as a bulwark against China's growing assertiveness across Asia. Furthermore, Washington could be in a better position to eventually elicit and count

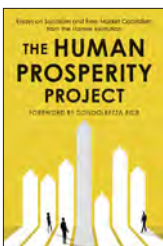
on Indian diplomatic support on fraught issues such as the future of Taiwan.

Over the past few decades, several US administrations have prioritized the relation-

ship with India despite considerable diffidence on the part of New Delhi. Instead of remaining content with incremental and fitful improvements in the bilateral relationship, New Delhi must trust Washington and move forward in constructing a multifaceted partnership that fosters peace and stability in Asia. ■

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# *Data to Live By*

**Investment in Africa has long been scattershot and ineffective. The reason: a lack of good data about how the investment would pay off. The World Bank can fix that problem.**

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***By Jendayi E. Frazer and Peter Blair Henry***

**E**very few years, the US government launches a new initiative to boost economic growth in Africa. In bold letters and with bolder promises, the White House announces that public-private partnerships hold the key to growth on the continent. It pledges to make these partnerships a cornerstone of its Africa policy, but time and again it fails to deliver.

A decade after President Barack Obama rolled out Power Africa—his attempt to solve Africa’s energy crisis by mobilizing private capital—half of the continent’s sub-Saharan population remains without access to electricity. In 2018, the Trump administration proclaimed that its Prosper Africa initiative would counter China’s debt-trap diplomacy and “expand African access to business finance.” Five years on, Chad, Ethiopia, Ghana, and Zambia are in financial distress and pleading for debt relief from Beijing and other creditors. Yet the Biden administration is once more touting the potential of public-private investment in Africa, organizing high-profile visits, and

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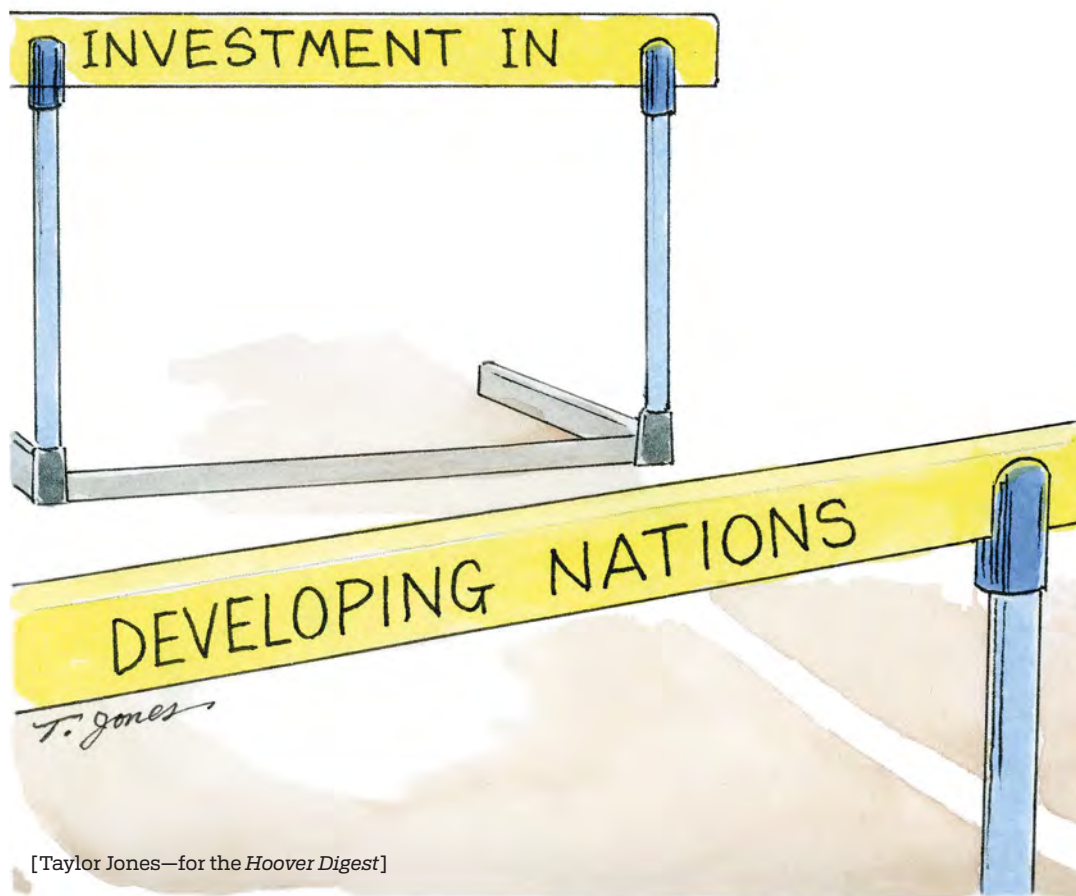
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holding leadership summits to prove that this time, the United States really is “all in” on the continent.

There is a reason these efforts have yielded so little: goodwill tours, clever slogans, and a portfolio of G-7 pet projects in Africa do not amount to a sound investment pitch. Potential investors, public and private, need to know which projects in which countries are economically and financially worthwhile. Above all, that requires current and comprehensive data on the expected returns that investment in infrastructure in the developing world can yield. At present, investors lack this information, so they pass.

If the United States wants to “build back better” in Africa—to expand access to business finance and encourage countries on the continent to choose sustainable and high-quality foreign investment over predatory lending from China and Russia—it needs to give investors access to better data.



[Taylor Jones—for the *Hoover Digest*]

Fortunately, Washington has just the right person for the job: Ajay Banga, whom the White House picked to lead the World Bank. Banga knows the value of the bank's vast but underused repository of data. In his past work as the



president and CEO of Mastercard, he built public-private partnerships that offered people around the globe better access to the banking system—and he did so by relying on data collected by the World Bank.

Banga should replicate that approach and marshal the bank's extensive data on developing countries' electric grids, roads, ports, and railways.

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***The World Bank should estimate the rates of return on potential infrastructure projects and give those data to investors.***

Using those data, the World Bank's experts should estimate the rates of return on potential infrastructure projects and make those estimates available to investors.

Doing so would not require so much as an additional nickel from Congress, and it would create the foundation currently lacking for data-driven investments that are profitable, efficient, and sustainable.

## **A DESPERATE NEED**

The stakes of US economic policy in Africa are as high as the outlook is challenging. A decade of unproductive loans, a pandemic, and the fallout from the war in Ukraine have left their mark on many African economies. Their governments now face the daunting tasks of improving energy and food security while also reducing dangerously heavy debt burdens. They must accomplish all this even as they try to combat climate change and navigate rising tensions among superpowers vying for the globe's natural resources.

To meet these challenges, African governments must, among other things, address an acute shortage of infrastructure. Only 43 percent of the continent's rural population, for instance, has access to an all-weather road. What little reliable infrastructure that exists is coming under further strain as the continent undergoes a demographic explosion. Unlike the graying and shrinking societies of the developed world, Africa is young and rapidly growing. Nigeria's population, already the seventh-largest in the world, is projected to expand by almost 3 percent per year until 2030.

The upside of that population growth is a booming supply of labor. Add the right combination of power, railways, roads, and ports—plus the right policies and governance structures for using that infrastructure efficiently—and higher economic growth will follow. That growth, in turn, is the most reliable way to reduce debt burdens and increase food security.

As for energy shortages and climate change, the most efficient way to address both concerns is to reduce the amount of energy used per dollar of GDP

produced. This, too, requires better infrastructure. Since most GDP is generated in cities, and because the United Nations forecasts that two billion people, most of them Africans, will migrate from rural to urban areas by the end of the decade, building and connecting cities with climate-friendly infrastructure would improve energy security while also helping tackle the climate crisis.

## **BUILD THE DATA, TOO**

None of this will happen, however, without public-private partnerships that channel rich countries' capital toward African economies. Multilateral development banks have known this for decades. But their efforts on this front, much like those of successive US administrations, have been characterized by hyperbole and little follow-through.

In 2015, when the World Bank launched its own campaign on the issue, in partnership with several other multilateral institutions, it claimed that private investors could alleviate infrastructure shortages, achieve the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals, and make money all at once. The campaign's "Billions to Trillions" tagline has since also been used by the Biden administration and the G-7.

But there has been little to no uptake on the trillion-dollar pitch because prospective investors have had nowhere to turn for reliable, up-to-date information. The only explicit, comprehensive source of estimates of the returns on infrastruc-

ture investments in developing countries—specifically, investments in roads and electricity—is a dusty white paper commissioned by the

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***Add the right combination of power, railways, roads, and ports—plus good policies and governance—and economic growth will follow.***

World Bank in the year 2000, based on data from 1985. The bank's leadership has failed, inexcusably, to update and disseminate these estimates ever since.

The good news is that the World Bank is unwittingly sitting on the necessary information. The returns in its original 2000 white paper were estimated using the bank's own data. Given his track record of leading with data at Mastercard, Banga is ideally positioned to inspire and drive his new colleagues to produce an updated set of estimates. Once independently vetted and validated, the new estimates should be published in a format that is free, user-friendly, and easily accessible. Governments and private investors, such as pension funds, asset managers, and sovereign wealth funds, could then

make better decisions about which projects in Africa—and in the developing world more broadly—are both socially beneficial and privately profitable.

To gather, verify, and disseminate the data is not enough. Stakeholders also need an effective way to parse it—to distinguish those countries in which the World Bank's threefold promise of better, sustainable, and profitable infrastructure is realistic from those in which it is not. A forthcoming article in the *Journal of Economic Literature*, co-written by one of us (Henry), articulates a practical approach by borrowing a concept from Banga's own corporate finance wheelhouse: the hurdle rate. When deciding whether to invest in a given infrastructure project, corporate investors assess whether the project's expected return exceeds the return they could earn by investing their money elsewhere, such as the stock market. If it clears that hurdle, so to speak, then investing makes sense.

Investment in a public infrastructure project in a poor country has *two* hurdles to clear: the expected return must exceed stock market returns both within the same country and in the rich countries from which the financing would flow. Only if a given project clears both hurdle rates will investing private savings from a rich country be profitable and socially worthwhile.

Applying the dual-hurdle test to the World Bank's existing 1985 data reveals a sobering reality. Contrary to the common refrain that poor countries abound with efficient and profitable infrastructure investment opportunities, only seven of the fifty-three states included in the bank's white paper cleared the two hurdles for both roads and electricity. There were, however, twenty-one countries that cleared both hurdles for roads. And in those twenty-one countries, the average return on roads was ten times as high as the average return on private

capital in rich countries.

Moreover, the extreme shortage of infrastructure that persists in the developing world—along with improvements in economic

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***The infrastructure problem has ramifications for rich and developing nations alike.***

policies and governance since 1985—suggests that returns could be even higher today. But without updating the data and the estimates, it is impossible to know.

## **GET GOING**

Free, user-friendly data on expected infrastructure returns would empower all the relevant stakeholders. African leaders could prioritize infrastructure projects with the best prospects for driving economic growth. Private investors could choose which infrastructure projects to finance. And members



of African civil society could hold their leaders accountable if those leaders choose to pursue projects that are not economically sound.

Getting this right is critical. How—and how quickly—the infrastructure problem is addressed has ramifications for rich and developing nations alike. Without efficient, climate-friendly infrastructure, the demographic and rural-urban shifts in Africa will lead to overcrowding and accelerating carbon dioxide emissions. Without infrastructure as a solid foundation for growth, governments in the region will struggle to generate jobs for their growing populations, driving an ever-greater exodus, through legal and other channels, of workers to the United States and other rich countries. Lending to the wrong projects will send vulnerable countries further down a path of default, leaving both Africa and the global economy worse off.

Banga has his work cut out for him at the World Bank. But the institution's new leader has a chance to unleash market financing for ecologically sound infrastructure that generates inclusive growth, averts Africa's looming debt crisis, slows climate change, and curbs China's hegemony. The bridge Banga can build—from slogans to a data-driven reality—is truly worth building. ■

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# *A Wider Shade of Terror*

**Jihadist violence in the Sahel represents a local tragedy—and a geopolitical crisis. Why China, Russia, and the United States all care.**

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***By Russell A. Berman***

In the wake of the 9/11 attacks, US foreign policy understandably shifted focus toward counterterrorism and a range of associated questions around Islamism. The wars in Afghanistan and Iraq ensued, in a period soon to be marked as well by the tragedies of the Arab Spring, especially the ongoing human rights catastrophe that the Assad regime inflicts on Syria. Throughout this era, the touchstones of policy were terrorism, counterterrorism, and state-sponsored terrorism.

Yet when the 2017 National Security Strategy was issued, the primacy of terrorism ceded ground to the challenges of great-power competition. The prospects for different kinds of war developed in the face of a different kind of enemy. Instead of Al-Qaeda and the Taliban, Russia and China emerged as the new adversaries, particularly in light of Russia's 2014 annexation of Crimea and the Chinese expansionism in the South China Sea. Recognizing China as the key adversary made it appear prudent to draw down forces in

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the Middle East while “pivoting” out of the region and turning instead to the presumed site of future confrontations: the western Pacific. That conclusion, however, has proven to be deeply flawed in the spectrum of evolving problems throughout the Middle East and North Africa.

This history of a paradigm shift—from counterterrorism to great-power competition—is too simplistic. The former never fully disappeared. It continues to exist side by side

with the great-power model because the threat of Islamist terrorism has not vanished. Meanwhile, it is foolish to imagine that the rising chal-

lenge of China means that the United States should reposition its forces by abandoning old theaters to regroup into the Pacific. While the most salient competitions with today’s adversaries involve Ukraine and Taiwan, it makes little sense to give up historical advantages in the Middle East in the name of facing threats elsewhere.

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***Economic emigration amplifies the movement of refugees. Thus the Sahel fuels domestic political crises in Europe.***

## **COUNTERTERRORISM CONTINUES**

This overlay of discrete frameworks—counterterrorism and great-power competition at the same time—applies especially in the Sahel. This is a region of poor, underdeveloped countries, often subject to problematic governance that exacerbates a sense of grievance among the population. An increasingly harsh climate undermines the local economy and contributes to emigration flows. The United States has valid reasons to be concerned about the scope of human misery in the Sahel, including violations of human rights.

Meanwhile, weak economies in the region point to another policy challenge for the United States and the West. Because economic emigration amplifies the movement of refugees into Europe, where an anti-immigrant backlash has upset the political landscapes, the Sahel contributes to the domestic political crises in many European countries. (Witness the rise of the National Rally in France, formerly known as the National Front, where opposition to immigration goes hand in hand with anti-Americanism.) In addition, the fragility of the Sahel’s societies contributes to a deep disaffection that breeds terrorism. Local jihadist groups, whether on their own or connected to larger networks of Al-Qaeda and the Islamic State, continue to pose a threat to Western interests and may gain the capacity to initiate attacks in Europe or the United States. Counterterrorism policies therefore remain relevant.

Nonetheless, counterterrorism alone is an insufficient paradigm to grasp the significance of Islamism in the Sahel, which is caught in a matrix of complicated international relations in the age of great-power

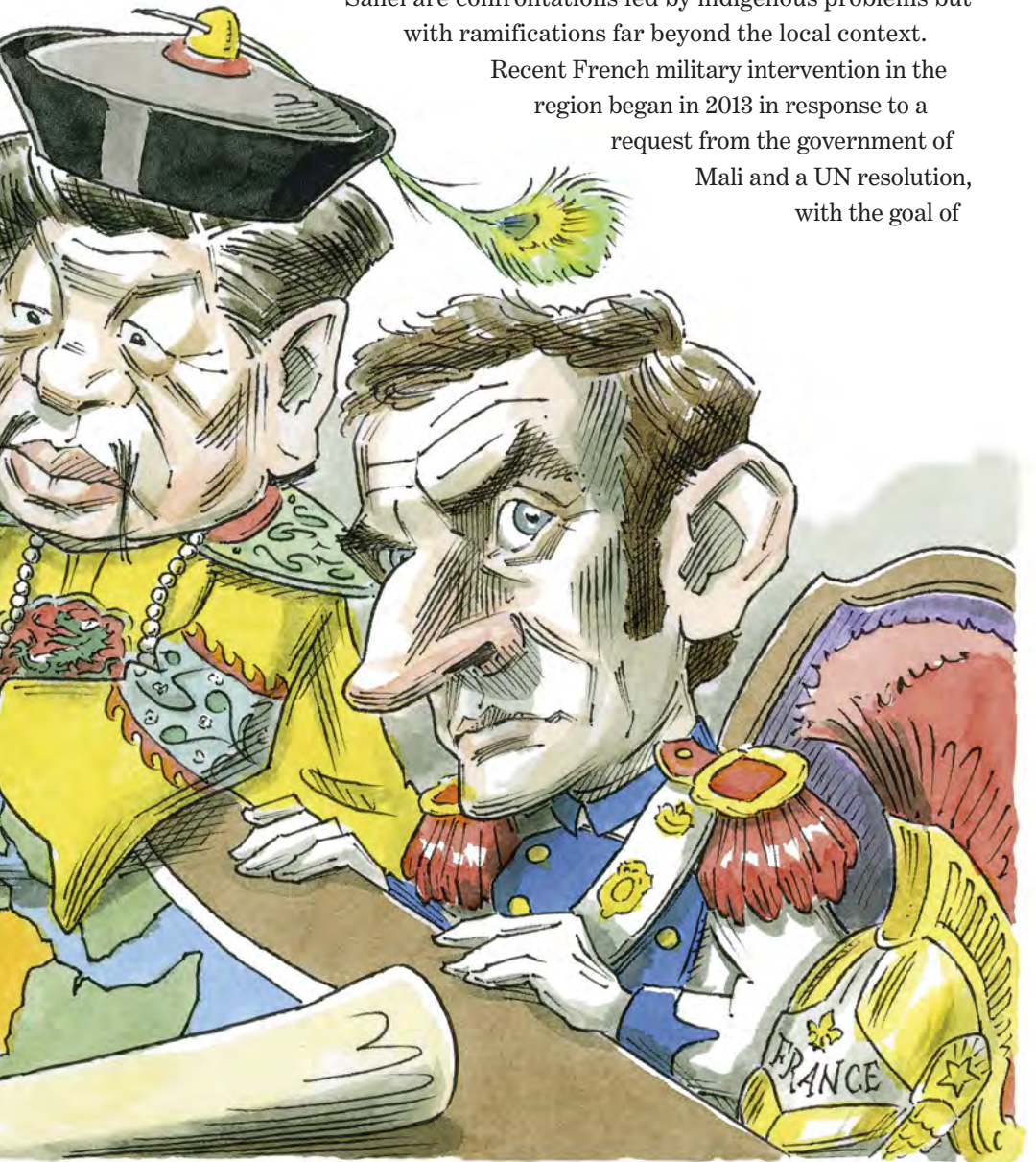


[Taylor Jones—for the Hoover Digest]



competition. Europe, Russia, and China are all involved, posing a complex challenge to US foreign policy. European countries want to stabilize the region to minimize refugee emigration to Europe. Russia is trying to expand its strategic footprint across the African continent. China, too, is expanding its economic influence in Africa, with an interest in natural resources, especially energy and minerals. At stake in the Sahel are confrontations fed by indigenous problems but with ramifications far beyond the local context.

Recent French military intervention in the region began in 2013 in response to a request from the government of Mali and a UN resolution, with the goal of





defending the country against Islamist militants. The campaign was initially successful, expanded its regional scope, and came to involve other European countries, as well as significant US support. Yet popular hostility to France,

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***Russia is trying to expand its strategic footprint across Africa, while China expands its economic influence.***

the former colonial power, grew, and the 2021 coup d'état in Bamako undermined relations with France. Violence in the region has grown: there

were 4,839 casualties in 2022, a 70 percent increase from 2021. France withdrew its troops in 2022 and in November, French President Macron declared the end of the operation. Despite this defeat in Mali, France and Europe more broadly continue to have an important interest in trying to achieve stability in the region because of their economic interests and in order to forestall greater migration. About three thousand French troops are still stationed in the Sahel region, in countries including Niger and Chad, to further an anti-jihadist mission.

While France has depended on US support in the Sahel, it is noteworthy that in April 2023, Macron argued against Europe's serving as a "vassal" to the United States with regard to the defense of Taiwan, thereby distancing himself from supporting Washington in the competition with China. While the remarks were no doubt an effort by Macron to distract from domestic political problems, they also indicated the recurring French vision of autonomy from the United States in international affairs.

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***Europe's security interests in the Sahel are significantly greater than those of the United States.***

Europe's security interests in the Sahel are significantly greater than those of the United States. A reasonable American approach would link US

assistance to European efforts in the Sahel and European cooperation with the United States in other regions. The price of US support should include Europe's commitment to supporting the United States toward China.

## **RUSSIA INTRUDES**

American security concerns in the Sahel do not involve immigration as much as do French security concerns. From a US vantage point, the key issues are the incubation of terrorism, but even more so, great-power competition, especially with Russia. Thanks to the intervention of the Wagner Group,

Russia has in effect displaced France as the key outside player in Mali, simultaneously wielding considerable influence in both Sudan and Libya. This Russian renaissance in Africa, reminiscent of the Soviet era, echoes the re-entry of Russia into the Middle East, a transformation that occurred under the Obama administration, when it accommodated the Russian role in Syria. It remains one of the worst legacies of his presidency.

Framing the politics of the Sahel in terms of the rivalry between the United States and Russia introduces a geopolitical perspective and raises the stakes considerably. Jihadism in the region is a source of local instability, giving expression to local grievances, but it also opens the door to Russian intrusion, a new front in a grand global competition. A successful US foreign policy should mobilize European engagement in the region, while providing appropriate support, in order to push back both against jihadism and against Russia. ■

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# *ISIS Can Pivot, Too*

**Pressured in Iraq and Syria, jihadist extremists have found a new welcome in Africa and Central Asia.**

***By Cole Bunzel***

**F**or the past several years, the jihadi terrorist group known as the Islamic State (IS) has been in decline in its original territorial base of Iraq and Syria. Though continuing to posture as a state-building enterprise—indeed, as the restored caliphate whose caliph is the ruler of all the world’s Muslims—it has failed to establish control anywhere in the region since early 2019. Where IS survives there it is an insurgency with cells that carry out assassinations, ambushes, and bombings of security forces and civilian targets. In this sense the group remains alive, but the momentum is not with the insurgents, as recent reporting has shown.

## ***Key points***

- » The Islamic State has been hobbled in Iraq and Syria but is spreading in parts of Africa and Central Asia.
- » IS’s “caliphate” idea lives on, especially in Africa. Al-Qaeda also has managed to maintain a presence there.
- » Investing in African security is a way to avoid terrorist plots against US citizens and territory.

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Emblematic of the decline is the failure of IS this year to launch its annual Ramadan offensive in Iraq—a tradition going back almost two decades to Abu Mus‘ab al-Zarqawi’s Al-Qaeda in Iraq. In Syria, meanwhile, the IS leadership has been under relentless assault from US Central Command (CENTCOM), which seems to announce a special operation targeting a senior IS leader almost monthly. Syria has ceased to be a reliable haven for IS leaders, including the “caliph,” of whom two were killed last year. The pseudonymous Abu al-Husayn al-Husayni al-Quarashi, who was announced as the new caliph in November 2022, was killed in 2023.

Where IS has succeeded in the past several years, however, is in spreading its ideology to the more far-flung areas of Africa and Central Asia, where thousands of militants have taken up the cause of the caliphate, to the great detriment of local populations. While one may question these local militants’ fidelity to IS as a centralized organization, the group does well in projecting organizational cohesion in its propaganda. In late 2022 and early 2023, for instance, hundreds of militants in these locales were pictured pledging fealty to the new caliph, despite being in complete ignorance of his identity or qualifications. The caliphate idea lives on, and especially in Africa, which together with Afghanistan features the most dangerous and active IS affiliates.

## A FRANCHISE MODEL FOR VIOLENCE

These IS affiliates are given the name of “provinces” in keeping with the original expansionary model introduced by Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi back in 2014. The smallest of the so-called “provinces” is the affiliate in Somalia, which has some two hundred fighters and claims attacks only occasionally but has proved effective as a

financial hub. (In January, a US special forces operation killed Bilal al-Sudani, an IS leader described by Secretary

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***Syria is no longer a reliable haven for IS leaders, including the “caliph,” of whom two were killed this past year.***

of Defense Lloyd Austin as “responsible for fostering the growing presence of ISIS in Africa and for funding the group’s operations worldwide, including in Afghanistan.”) To the north, in Egypt, is the network of militants known as the “Sinai Province,” which remains an active insurgency with hundreds of fighters targeting Egyptian security forces.

It is farther south, in the Sahel region and in the Lake Chad basin of north-eastern Nigeria, where IS has its most significant presence in Africa. These





are the so-called “Sahel Province” and “West Africa Province,” respectively. The latter, which grew out of the once Al-Qaeda-aligned Boko Haram, boasts some five thousand fighters and controls broad swathes of rural territory, where it levies taxes, provides security, and imposes a harsh interpretation of Islamic law. It frequently clashes with Nigerian military and African Union forces seeking to suppress it.

The Sahel Province is a newer and smaller entity, having once been classified as a unit within the West Africa Province but since March 2022 emerging as a “province” in its own right. Based along the border between Mali and Niger, the Sahel branch of IS formally began operations in 2019 with assaults on security forces and mass atrocities carried out against perceived heretics. While numbers of fighters are difficult to estimate, the Sahel Province has been on an upswing in recent years, and especially since the departure of French forces from Mali in mid-2022. As one recent analysis of the group’s operations concludes, “IS Sahel is in the process of establishing a



pseudo-state encompassing the rural areas stretching from Gao in the north to Dori in the south and from N'Tillit in the west to the border area of Tahoua in the east.”

Beyond the Sahel and northeastern Nigeria, IS has also established itself in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and in Mozambique, where local jihadi networks have rebranded as IS provinces (the “Central Africa Province” and “Mozambique Province,” respectively).

## WEAPONIZING INFORMATION

The activities of all these “provinces” are proudly trumpeted in IS propaganda, and indeed it is team Africa that features most regularly and prominently in IS’s centralized media network online. On the messaging platform Telegram, for instance, where IS media are curated and distributed by semiofficial channels, most of the content these days relates to the African “provinces.” On May 16, for example, the IS media feed included a report on a double suicide attack carried out against African Union forces in northeastern Nigeria and photos of an attack on a government outpost in Beni in the Democratic Republic of Congo. The feed for the following day featured photos of IS fighters in combat with the Nigerian army, photos of IS fighters seizing control of a town in northeastern Mali and distributing pamphlets on IS’s ideology, and four further claims of attacks in Nigeria. The West Africa and Sahel “provinces” also regularly produce videos highlighting their activities. A video from the Sahel affiliate in April showed footage of battles against various enemies, executions, and the carrying out of some of the *hudud* penalties in Islamic law, namely stonings and amputations. At one point a narrator proclaims the IS presence in the Sahel as an “admission” of the West’s failure to destroy the caliphate project in Iraq and Syria.

Similar sentiments appear in IS’s weekly Arabic newspaper, every issue of which includes an editorial on a particular theme. Several of these have highlighted the importance of Africa in keeping the caliphate project alive, even stating that Africa has replaced Iraq and Syria as the place where *tamkin*, or territorial control, has been established and thus to where Muslims ought to perform *hijra* (“emigration”). “The scenes that we are seeing today in the land of Africa are the same that we were seeing before in Iraq and Syria,” one editorial stated last year, going on to call on the faithful to make *hijra* to Africa, “for today it is a land of *hijra* and jihad.”

Thus far, the call does not appear to have been heeded. We have not seen the thousands of extremists flocking to Africa that we saw going

to Iraq and Syria in 2014 after the declaration of the caliphate. Perhaps the semi-arid landscapes of rural Mali and the Sambisa Forest do not evoke the caliphal dream quite like the Islamic heartlands of the Fertile Crescent. Nonetheless, the prospect of increasingly robust IS territories in Africa is a strong likelihood, and one that the West ought to take seriously.

IS, however, does not hold a monopoly over the African jihadi scene. Al-Qaeda has also managed to maintain a presence on the continent. Much as with IS, the central leadership of Al-Qaeda has been battered and bruised to the point of marginality, but its affiliates in Africa have helped prop up the brand name. Al-Qaeda has three active African affiliates, the most significant being Al-Shabaab in Somalia, which according to the United Nations has seven thousand to ten thousand fighters and generates \$100 million to \$150 million per year in tax revenue in the vast areas under its control.

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***Sahel-based jihadi groups also fight each other, in a war fueled by religious animosity.***

Al-Qaeda's oldest affiliate in Africa is the Algeria-based Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghrib (AQIM), which has been operationally constrained in recent years despite succeeding in sponsoring the third Al-Qaeda affiliate in Africa, Jama'at Nusrat al-Islam wa'l-Muslimin (JNIM).

JNIM, based in the Sahel, was announced in 2017 as the union of four Mali-based extremist groups. It is more powerful than the IS affiliate in the Sahel, holding more territory and carrying out three times as many operations. It also proceeds with a lighter touch as regards its use of violence and imposition of Islamic law and has even sought at times to negotiate for strategic advantage with the state and nonstate entities it considers heretical. Since 2019, JNIM and its IS rival have fought each other in a war fueled by religious animosity, with JNIM branding IS fighters as "Kharijite" extremists and IS describing JNIM as "the apostate Al-Qaeda militia."

## **AN EXPANDING THREAT**

The rising specter of jihadism in Africa is no doubt concerning, and mitigating the threat ought to be a priority for US policy makers. To be sure, most of these movements are focused on local objectives (i.e., the defeat of local regimes and their replacement with Islamic states). Yet the threat to the West, including the United States, is real. Even if just a small percentage of a

local jihadi group's efforts are devoted to international acts of terrorism, this creates the potential for a devastating terrorist attack that could derail US foreign policy, distracting us from the important challenges of a rising China and revisionist Russia.

As AFRICOM commander General Michael Langley recently noted in testimony before the Senate Armed Services Committee, "As [these jihadi

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***Weak, poorly governed states have allowed for the emergence of ungoverned spaces. The jihadis exploit this.***

groups in Africa] grow, the risk of terrorist plots against US citizens, embassies, and ultimately the homeland are likely to rise. . . . In the late twentieth century, Al-

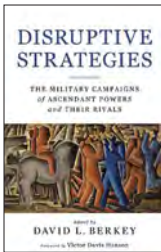
Qaeda grew unchecked in Africa, culminating in the 1998 bombings of our embassies in Kenya and Tanzania." Investing in African security, therefore, ought to be of paramount importance, all the more so as Russia and China seek to compete with the West by offering their own services in this and other regards.

There are no easy solutions, and all the "provinces" and affiliates described must be approached in their own particular contexts. This could, in the case of JNIM, include a mix of counterterrorism pressure and negotiation with the aim of peeling off those militants less committed to global jihad than others. With the French departure, however, the window for such an approach has likely closed. The principal means of constraining these groups must be military force, together with support for good governance and institution building, which are poorly lacking in many parts of Africa. It is weak and poorly governed states that have allowed for the emergence of ungoverned spaces that the jihadis exploit. The government of Burkina Faso, for instance, controls only about 40 percent of the state's territory. The matter of military coups d'état has also complicated matters for the West. After two coups in Mali in 2020 and 2021, French forces departed the country after a nine-year deployment, leaving Russia's Wagner Group mercenaries to fill the void.

In Africa, the United States finds itself at the intersection of counterterrorism and strategic competition. It must find a way to navigate both. After the coups, Mali may be an impractical partner, but the West can still hold the tide in the Sahel, and elsewhere in Africa, by committing itself to local and regional counterterrorism missions that can, at a minimum, slow these groups' momentum.

Only through “relentless suppression and ultimate pacification,” as General Langley put it, will the local peoples and international community be made safe. That is what the United States and its partners aimed for in Iraq and Syria, at great cost and with unbounded commitment. They should aim for the same in Africa as well. ■

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# Governance First

**Coups are unraveling many US efforts to bring security and democracy to Africa. It's time to emphasize political stability over weapons.**

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**By Alexander Noyes**

Both terrorism and coups are on the rise in the Sahel, a troubling trend that the United States should be working to reverse. To do this, Washington needs to ramp up support aimed at improving security governance, professionalizing militaries, and strongly sanctioning all forms of military takeovers in the region. This will require a serious shift from the current US security approach.

The Sahel is now the epicenter of terrorism globally. The region accounted for 43 percent of global terrorism deaths in 2022, according to the latest data from the Global Terrorism Index produced for the Institute for Economics and Peace (IEP). Burkina Faso and Mali alone accounted for a huge chunk of the 2022 violence, making up “73 percent of terrorism deaths in the Sahel in 2022 and 52 percent of all deaths from terrorism in sub-Saharan Africa,” the IEP reported. This recent spike of extremist violence in the region is in line with longer-term trends, as terrorism rates increased more than 2,000 percent in the Sahel over the past fifteen years.

In addition to this worrying spike in extremist violence, coup plotters have also launched a wave of successful military interventions in the region over the

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*Alexander Noyes participates in the Hoover Institution's Herbert and Jane Dwight Working Group on the Middle East and the Islamic World. He is a political scientist at the RAND Corporation and former senior adviser for security cooperation assessment, monitoring, and evaluation in the Office of the Secretary of Defense for Policy.*



***DISRUPTORS: Supporters of Ibrahim Traoré, who seized power in Burkina Faso in a 2022 coup, carry Russian flags as they ride around Ouagadougou, the capital. Traoré has acknowledged help from Russia's Wagner Group mercenaries.*** [Sophie Garcia—Associated Press]

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past three years, including two coups each in Mali and Burkina Faso alone. This resurgence of such violent overthrows spurred United Nations chief António Guterres to decry an “epidemic” of coups, a departure from a previous lull in the region.

## **MIXED RESULTS**

The United States has responded to these dual developments in a number of ways. To counter the terrorist threat, in addition to supporting regional and international military operations, the United States has deployed a wide range of security assistance tools. The United States has spent more than \$3.3 billion in security assistance over two decades in the

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***Terrorism rates increased more than 2,000 percent in the Sahel over the past fifteen years.***

Sahel, according to the Security Assistance Monitor. This assistance has often led with tactical training and equipping partner militaries and elite

special counterterrorism units in the region, as well as large-scale military-to-military exercises and smaller-scale advise-and-assist missions.

On the coup front, the US response has been decidedly mixed. The United States condemned armed takeovers and has suspended some security assistance in Mali, Burkina Faso, and Guinea since 2021. But in Chad, a longtime US security partner, the United States danced around the “coup” label and did not apply sanctions or suspend assistance.

Because the United States has engaged so widely in the region, a few recent coup plotters received US training, including in Guinea, where Green Berets were actively training the soldiers who left to launch a coup in 2021.

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***An overly militaristic and repressive response only fuels grievances against governments and security forces.***

The available evidence suggests US assistance is highly unlikely to have directly contributed to any coup activity. But the worrying actions of

US-trained partner forces do call into question the overall efficacy of US assistance, specifically the degree of emphasis the United States places on imparting democratic civil-military relations and rule of law.

Further complicating matters is an increased amount of engagement from outside powers vying for access and influence in the region, namely China and Russia. Research from the RAND Corporation has documented that while US and Russian influence in sub-Saharan Africa has remained largely the same over the past two decades, Chinese influence has grown significantly. As the French have recently begun to pull back their military presence in the Sahel, the Russians are actively trying to step into the void and increase their influence with coup governments and other undemocratic leaders in the region.

## **SMARTER SECURITY**

So, what is to be done? To help turn the tide of these increasingly precarious trends in the region—while also countering Chinese and Russian activity—US security policy must present a clearer alternative to the aims of Beijing’s and Moscow’s authoritarian expansion in the region.

To do so, the United States must first shift its security policy away from the delivery of tactical weapons and toward a “governance first” policy. Despite some recent steps in the right direction, the US model of military assistance in the Sahel often defaults to tactical-level training and equipping of unprofessional and often predatory security forces, which frequently

makes things worse. A policy shift would lead with support for institution building aimed at fostering civilian control and responsible use of force within Sahelian militaries.

The overwhelming evidence shows that an overly militaristic and repressive response to terrorism is counterproductive. It only fuels grievances against governments and security forces, and these grievances are the leading cause of extremism

in many African countries. Moreover, research shows that a more holistic, smartly sequenced security-assistance

approach can deliver soft- and hard-power results in Africa and beyond.

Indeed, a US and NATO focus on institution building and defense-management reform in Ukraine before the full Russian invasion has proven to be remarkably successful. This emphasis on good governance, doctrine, and logistics helped to build more professional and effective military forces in Ukraine, with clear outside strategic payoffs for the United States and its allies.

Second, the US response to all types of military takeovers must be much stronger and consistent. An uneven coup response is counterproductive in the short term, giving fresh coup governments initial room to breathe and consolidate power. It is also unhelpful in the long term, creating an incentive for future overthrows by the military. Prospective coup plotters see that they too can avoid the coup label—and corollary sanctions—as long as their country has

firm security ties with the United States and other Western powers.

In addition to unequivocally condemning coups, the United States should

also suspend assistance and apply visa restrictions on coup leaders, regardless of how “soft” (see Chad, Zimbabwe, Egypt) or hard the military action.

Moving in this direction will require strong coordination across the US government, particularly between the Defense and State Departments. The launch of the Twenty-first Century Partnership for African Security in December 2022 is a start, but its future depends on the details and the implementation. A fundamental shift toward a governance-first security

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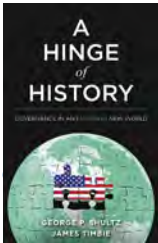
***The United States should condemn coups and suspend assistance to coup leaders.***

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***Moving in this direction will require strong coordination across the US government, particularly between the Defense and State Departments.***

policy in the Sahel—leading with support for security governance and institution building—is likely to lead to more professional, democratic, and stable partners, as well as pay strategic dividends for the United States. ■

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# Power and Persuasion

**Russia and China deploy both carrots and sticks to increase their wealth and influence across Africa.**

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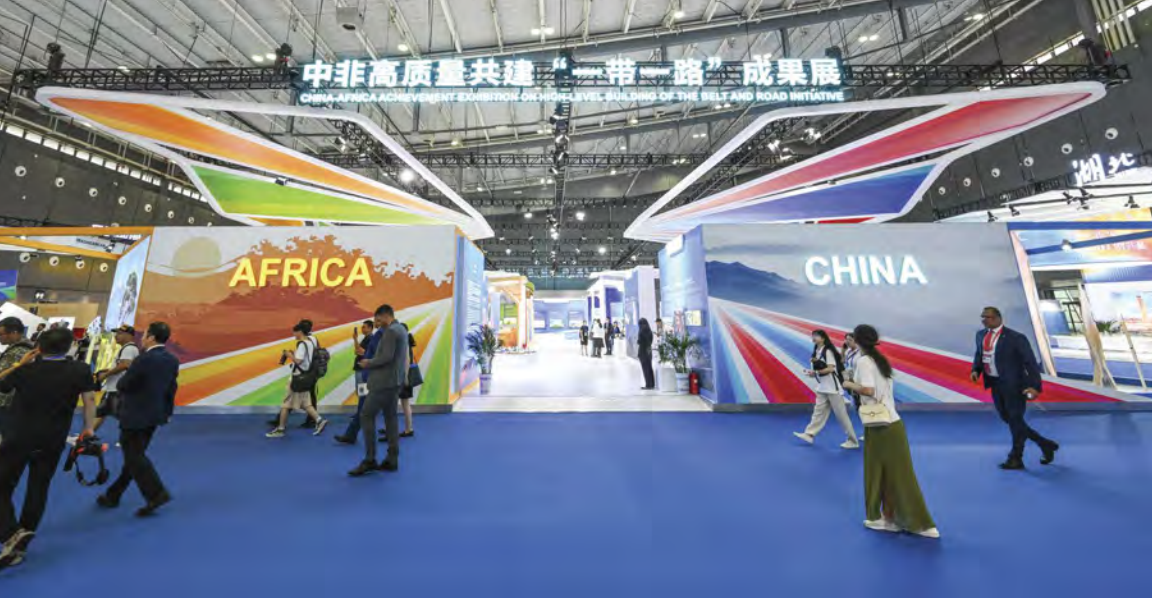
***By Thomas H. Henriksen***

A second scramble for Africa is under way among the great powers. Unlike in the first scramble, foreign powers now seek access to Africa's abundant mineral wealth without any of the pretense, displayed by Europeans a century ago, of a civilizing mission. Russia and China are leading the current resource grab. Both are content to exercise influence through weak autocratic and dependent indigenous regimes, which welcome Russian mercenaries and Chinese state economic enterprises to bolster their rule.

The first scramble for the continent escalated in the waning years of the nineteenth century and lasted until the outbreak of World War I in 1914. This partition of nearly 90 percent of the world's second-largest continent by area and population witnessed its conquest, annexation, and colonization by seven European nations. Great Britain, France, Belgium, Portugal, and other West European countries dispatched soldiers, missionaries, officials, and even settlers to take over land and grow sought-after crops like cotton and coffee. Today's "scramblers" have much less interest in planting their national flags in colonies than did their nineteenth-century predecessors, who strove to color the map with British red or French blue.

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*Thomas H. Henriksen is a senior fellow (emeritus) at the Hoover Institution.*



***BELT AND ROAD: Visitors walk past the exhibition hall at the third China-Africa Economic and Trade Expo in Changsha last June. China has embarked on a trillion-dollar infrastructure building spree around the world, focusing on seventy developing nations, including almost every state in Africa. In addition, China is now the chief exporter of arms to sub-Saharan Africa, having elbowed aside Russia.*** [Chen Yehua—Newscom]

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After World War II, Africa's political class ousted the foreign occupations. By the late 1960s, much of Africa was nearly free of direct European control. A number of former colonies emerged as democracies, but others continue under despotic and kleptomaniac rulers, who need outside

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***The first scramble for Africa escalated in the waning years of the nineteenth century. It focused on conquest and colonization.***

support to hang on to the spoils of office. Little wonder that undemocratic and unscrupulous African presidents turn to the dictatorial regimes in Russia and China for

model and direction, as well as for military and financial help to prop up their rule.

## **ARMS AND MERCENARIES**

Moscow and Beijing exploit Africa's vulnerability for their own ends. Neither the Kremlin nor the Chinese leaders gravitate to honest democratic countries. They prefer under-siege despots who are despised by their citizenry or threatened by Islamist extremists. Western leaders, on the other hand, tend

to eschew nondemocracies. France, for example, withdrew its five thousand troops from Mali after the nation underwent a coup in 2022. The French presence had kept Islamist terrorists at bay since 2013. Mali now relies on Russian mercenaries to combat Islamist insurgents.

Russian commercial trade with Africa is minuscule compared with that of the United States or China. As for armaments, China is now the chief exporter of arms to sub-Saharan Africa, having elbowed aside Russia, whose exports have suffered under the international sanctions imposed after Russia's invasion of Ukraine. The United States is a distant third in Africa, though still the largest arms exporter globally.

Africa serves to ease the Kremlin's diplomatic isolation imposed by the United States. For instance, Sergey Lavrov, the Russian foreign minister, visited Africa twice in ten days in early 2023. Diplomacy aside, Russia's quest for natural resources

and pursuit of questionable business transactions are furthered most directly by its use of quasi-military forces.

Take Russia's Wagner

Group, the same band of mercenaries who inflict destruction and death on Ukrainian soldiers and civilians. Formed in 2014, the Wagner Group has contracts with several African leaders to fight their enemies and train the regimes' armed forces against opponents and Islamist infiltrators. Since 2018, the paramilitary group has signed military assistance and security deals with Mali, the Central African Republic, and an armed faction in the Libyan civil war.

In the Central African Republic, Wagner mercenaries train the national army while taking over territories rich in diamond deposits. They export the diamonds through local strongmen in neighboring Sudan and on to Dubai, a mineral trading hub. Next door, in the Republic of Chad, Wagner operatives have been accused by US intelligence of aiding Chadian rebels in their efforts to destabilize the government.

Wagner's mercenaries are a formidable and noxious presence on a continent lacking modern and democratically oriented militaries that abstain from politics. Wagner's armed footprint is nearly the size of America's six thousand troops and advisers on the continent. The US Treasury Department has designated the Wagner Group as a transnational criminal organization for its warfighting activities in Ukraine.

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***A number of former colonies continue under despotic and kleptomaniac rulers, who need outside support to hang onto office.***

And in Africa, citing reports from human rights groups and local authorities, Treasury officials have charged Wagner personnel with mass killings, torture, and rape.

## **CHINA PLAYS THE TRADE CARD**

China presents an entirely different threat to the West. Its initial strategy in various forms dates back to the early 1960s, when Beijing aligned with African national liberation movements fighting European colonialism. The anti-colonial struggles taxed Britain, France, and Portugal while opening doors for Marxist impact on the continent. China's gains, however, were short-lived. China's initial African intervention collapsed when Mao Zedong's Cultural Revolution (1966–76) convulsed his country.

When China returned to the African scene, it pursued commercial engagement. In 2013, a year after Xi Jinping became paramount leader, China launched its enormous and costly Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). The BRI embarked on a trillion-dollar infrastructure building spree

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***The familiar Russian mercenaries have military assistance and security deals with Mali, the Central African Republic, and an armed faction in the Libyan civil war.***

around the world, focusing on seventy developing nations in dire need of railways, dams, airports, highways, tunnels, and pipelines. These construction efforts deepened commercial

relations and financial obligations between China and almost every state in Africa, with special ties to Angola, Ethiopia, and Zambia.

China's aggressive posture in the South China Sea is matched by these assertive business activities in Africa. Africa figures prominently in Beijing's global commercial enterprises. In fact, China is Africa's largest two-way trading partner, reaching \$254 billion in trade in 2021, a number four times as high as US-Africa trade.

By themselves, China's building and investment are not worrisome to Washington so long as commercial projects do not restrict Western access to strategic minerals and sources of bauxite, oil, and copper. Of greater concern is China's pursuit of a military base in oil-rich Equatorial Guinea, on the west African coast, similar to the one China built in Djibouti, on the Horn of Africa. And China's championing of dictatorial regimes constitutes a direct ideological confrontation with Washington and its democratic allies.

In some countries, the goals of the two authoritarian powers collide. For instance, Russian and Chinese tensions have flared over their dueling claims over gold mines in the Central African Republic, a country plagued by internal conflict since 2013. In March, for instance, nine Chinese nationals were killed at a mine overseen by Chinese companies. The Russians, particularly the Wagner Group, come in for blame for training and arming the pro-Russian government, which struggles against local rebel factions bent on ousting the nation's president. Despite words of global unity, Russia and China do have their own agendas in Africa.

## A HISTORIC THREAT REVIVED

Aside from great-power competition, the United States and the West face another perilous challenge in Africa. This threat re-emerged from Islamist extremists who had been active in the continent for centuries, going back to their seventh-century origins in what is today Saudi Arabia. Such forces have conquered, controlled, and proselytized both to spread their faith and to resist Western encroachments. Militants from both the Islamic State (IS) and Al-Qaeda, after having sustained defeats in the Middle East, now focus on the Sahel region below the Sahara Desert. This strip encompasses parts of Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania, and Mali; all those nations have felt the threat of radical Islam once again.

The 9/11 terrorist attacks in the United States contributed to the resurgence of militant Islam in Arabia, Asia, and Africa. To combat militant movements in Somalia, Mali, Niger, and other nations, the Pentagon deploys highly trained special-operations forces, along with State Department officials and nongovernmental organizations, to fight Islamist insurgents and help local governments win over

their people to democracy, development, and human rights. US efforts include implementing population-centric civic

measures (medical and veterinary clinics, wells, and crop cultivation) as well as protecting Africans from gunmen and other violence.

The bush warfare is intrinsically political. The shadow warfare carried out by Islamist insurgents—blending in with the population after shootings, bombings, and raids—is hard to defeat. No quick victories are likely, only continual patrols and other security measures. Yet a military response alone is not enough to support democracy and human rights. US personnel are also

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***These are “forever wars,” without a doubt. Nevertheless, they must be fought.***

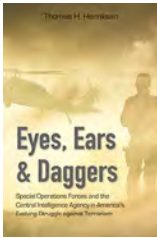


helping African leaders master the skills and attitudes to entrench honest, accountable administrations in desperately poor lands.

These are “forever wars,” without a doubt. Nevertheless, they must be fought, or terrorism will return to US shores. The costs are low compared to those of wars in Iraq, Afghanistan, and Ukraine. American casualties are rare, and the yearly expenses take up roughly 0.3 percent of the Defense Department’s personnel and budgetary resources.

Many African leaders resent being treated as pawns by competing superpowers. They are simultaneously receptive to Chinese aid and investment and to American trade and assistance, and they want to avoid choosing one side over the other. Washington is aware of the need to favor cooperation over confrontation, even as tensions with China and Russia demand more effort, resources, and diplomatic ingenuity to forestall another scramble for Africa. ■

### *Special to the Hoover Digest.*



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# *Triage Teaching*

**Students struggling with pandemic learning loss desperately need better instruction—not just more of it—to make up for lost time. Most students will never get it.**

***By Margaret Raymond***

**M**ost of the programs school districts have implemented to address COVID learning loss are doomed to fail.

Despite well-intended and rapid responses, solutions such as tutoring or summer school will miss their goals. Existing policies have failed to consider the unique needs of the students these services seek to help, and thus are destined to waste vast sums of relief funding in pursuit of an impossible goal.

How do we know this? Recent research from our team at the Center for Research on Education Outcomes (CREDO) at Stanford University looked at learning patterns in sixteen states to see how recovery efforts will affect students' academic careers.

## ***Key points***

» Education policies have failed to consider students' unique needs.

» A “mastery”-based approach, rather than the current way of organizing students by grade level, could support learning recovery.

» The best teachers get the best results. And, thanks to technology, the best teachers could be widely shared.

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***Margaret Raymond*** is a distinguished research fellow at the Hoover Institution. She is the founder and director of the Center for Research on Education Outcomes (CREDO) at Stanford University and the co-chair of the Hoover Education Success Initiative.

Our partnerships with state education departments provide the means to examine the experience of anonymous individual students as they move through public schools. Their scores on standardized state tests reveal what they know at the end of each school year and how that knowledge changes over time. This level of insight is both wide (covering all tested students in each state) and deep (the data illuminate students' learning histories).

The COVID-19 pandemic has only magnified existing learning disparities. If an average student typically gains a year's worth of knowledge in a year's time, then those with greater-than-average learning progress more quickly. Conversely, those who do not learn as much as the average student gain less than what's expected. Reviewing these data over multiple years yields a picture of the pace of learning (POL) for individual students.

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### ***The COVID-19 pandemic only magnified existing learning disparities.***

The differences in POL are the missing factor in policy decisions about post-COVID efforts.

Our research assumes that the pre-pandemic pace of learning for individual students is the best that can be expected in the post-COVID years. Using longitudinal student data, we calculated each student's historical POL and, based on those measures, projected outcomes under different learning loss scenarios. We assume students have lost an average of ninety days of learning to COVID-19, which other research has corroborated. We then considered the effects of additional time, measured in extra years of schooling.

Without additional learning time, fewer than two-thirds of the students we studied will attain average knowledge in reading and math by the end of their senior year in high school. But more critically, even many years of additional instruction would yield only a small improvement. Even if schools offered an additional five years of education (assuming students would partake), only about 75 percent of students would hit that twelfth-grade benchmark. One-quarter will remain undereducated.

Of course, these estimates are theoretical. No district in the country is capable of extending the years of schooling they offer by these amounts.

## **POSSIBLE ANSWERS**

These findings reveal a lot about the future students face. Those who will reach the twelfth-grade benchmark on time have POLs that are strong enough to keep them on track. They are not the ones to worry about. It is the students with smaller POLs who require the most attention and support. Currently,

for every day of instruction, they gain less than a full day of learning. Even a full year of additional schooling may have little impact for them. Programs of shorter duration are even less likely to produce their desired aims.

Current remedies are insufficient to solve the learning gaps for low-POL students. High-dosage tutoring, for example, consists of four to six hours a week of extra learning time. For average learners, that leads to an increase of about 8 percentile points on state achievement tests. But because students with low POLs receive less benefit from every hour or day of instruction offered, they will not progress to the same degree as the average student. At the end of a school year, the total number of hours cannot produce the sustained impacts needed for the low-POL population. Moreover, a large number of studies have found that the benefits

from tutoring do not survive into the future for any students. Summer camps offer even less

cause for optimism: they provide lower dosages, and for a shorter time.

Ultimately, the accounting does not add up.

Still, against these discouraging findings, there are promising options for addressing learning recovery. One is to allow students to progress at their own pace toward established benchmarks rather than holding everyone to a fixed timeline of learning. Shifting to a mastery-based approach, rather than maintaining the current system of organizing students by grade level, could achieve this. As long as students continue to progress and demonstrate growth, their schooling could continue. High achievers could reach the benchmarks faster than is usually allowed and move on to more advanced goals. Releasing students from the traditional school year would free up resources that could be devoted to helping lower-POL students.

Another option would be to change the pace of learning only for students with slower rates of progress. Children need higher-quality instruction to realize greater learning gains, and the evidence is clear that the best teachers get better results than average educators. Making sure each classroom has excellent instruction should be the ultimate goal.

## **NEW IDEAS**

Ways to find and deploy the most successful educators already exist. By utilizing data from professional observations and student test scores, schools could identify the instructors who truly make a difference in their students' learning and deploy those high-impact teachers in new ways.

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***Neither tutoring nor summer camps is likely to make up the difference.***

One approach would be to offer incentives—bonus pay, for example, or credit that could be put toward a sabbatical or other specialized training—to motivate higher-quality teachers to add students to their classes. Offering extra support to teachers who take on extra tasks, such as class aides or release from other duties, could also help. And placing lower-performing students in classes with a high-quality teacher and higher-performing peers can produce a jump in performance.

In places where the supply of high-need students outstrips the availability of high-impact teachers, an alternative could be to find the best educator in the state for a given subject, who would receive a substantial payment for recording an entire year's worth of lessons. The videos and all supporting materials—lesson plans, worksheets, quizzes, etc.—would be posted online for other teachers to use.

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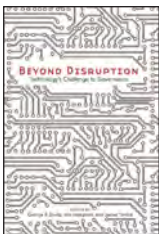
***Despite these discouraging findings, there are promising options for addressing learning recovery.***

We call this approach the Instructional Commons. Building on the notion of Massive Open Online Courses, it offers significant benefits: peer-

to-peer training, the opportunity for teachers to observe high-quality instruction in depth, a ready resource for their own lesson planning, and a common standard for educators and administrators to employ for professional development. If adopted successfully, this approach can elevate the caliber of the existing teacher force at relatively modest cost and without political battles.

The country is at a pivotal moment in K–12 public education. It is time to decide whether we are willing to make the necessary changes to the current system for our students' future. This will require deep alterations to the existing organization and practice of K–12 public education. The alternative: continued support of an institutional system that will almost certainly fail. ■

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# A Few Critical Omissions

**Most of those who support teaching “critical race theory” (CRT) to children don’t realize it *rejects* the values of the civil rights movement. CRT activists profit from that confusion.**

**By Max Eden and Michael T. Hartney**

**O**n a recent episode of his cable television program, Bill Maher asked Bernie Sanders to explain the difference between equality and equity, and the long-winded senator was at an unusual loss for words.

“I don’t know what the answer to that is,” Sanders mumbled after an awkward pause. Pressed to clarify his position, Sanders composed himself and offered only that he supports “equality of opportunity” over equal outcomes. He does?

## Key points

- » A survey found that 90 percent of Americans support the idea that society should treat people the same, regardless of race.
- » Eighty percent of respondents misunderstood the aims of critical race theory.
- » News stories perpetuate the misleading notion that CRT continues the civil rights drive for equality of opportunity.

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**Max Eden** is a research fellow at the American Enterprise Institute. **Michael T. Hartney** is a Hoover Fellow, an adjunct fellow at the Manhattan Institute, and an assistant professor of political science at Boston College. His first book is *How Policies Make Interest Groups: Governments, Unions, and American Education* (University of Chicago Press, 2022).

If this answer is sincere, it would put Sanders, a self-described democratic socialist, substantially to the right of the “equity”-obsessed Biden administration and today’s public education establishment. If, on the other hand, Sanders was merely being politically adroit, his answer demonstrates how quickly

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***Most Americans, including most Democrats, strongly favor equality of opportunity over a government goal of equitable results.***

the left’s language game breaks down when basic definitions are required.

Sanders isn’t dumb. He knows what the legacy media are loath to admit, particularly on the issue of

racial inequality: most Americans, including most Democrats, strongly favor equality of opportunity over a government assurance of equitable results.

One reason the left doesn’t want this debate can be seen in the fight over teaching critical race theory (CRT) in American schools. Recall that CRT bills itself as an academic theory that emphasizes how race intersects with societal institutions to reproduce and sustain unequal outcomes observed across racial groups today. Focusing only on whether CRT is formally being taught in K–12 lesson plans, however, is a distraction. The left prefers to keep the dispute focused on this point of contention, which boils down to precise definitions, because it obscures a larger fight: a clash between politically popular principles of colorblindness and nondiscrimination, on the one hand, and deeply unpopular schooling policies and practices that emphasize race-consciousness and equitable outcomes, on the other.

Don’t take our word for it. In a recent study, “A House Divided? What Americans Really Think about Controversial Topics in Schools,” researchers at the University of Southern California concluded that “despite the noisy debate around CRT . . . we found broad agreement on certain racial beliefs, especially that our goal as a society should be that all people should be treated the same without regard to the color of their skin.”

The USC survey revealed even more. Most Americans know little about the tenets of CRT. The largest source of public confusion is the mistaken belief that CRT embraces the principle of colorblindness. Nine out of ten Americans told the USC survey team that they favor treating all Americans equally without regard to race, yet 84 percent also mistakenly said that CRT proponents embrace this same colorblind ethos.

“Despite the explicit opposition of CRT to colorblindness,” the authors noted, “more than 80 percent of [Americans] who claimed to have heard of CRT either did not know that colorblindness is not aligned to CRT or were wrong

and thought that it was.” What’s more, “this was the only [survey question] for which most respondents confidently answered but were incorrect.”

An even more intriguing finding lay buried in the survey. The researchers asked Americans whether they supported teaching CRT in K-12 schools and whether parents should be able to opt their children out of lessons containing content that they disagree with. Except for political party, the biggest factor shaping respondents’ answers to those questions was whether they falsely

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***The largest source of public confusion is the belief that critical race theory embraces the principle of colorblindness. It doesn’t.***

believed that CRT embraced principles of colorblindness. For example, among those who mistakenly said that CRT was consistent with colorblindness, nearly half favored teaching it in schools. Yet among the much smaller group who understood that CRT stands against colorblindness, fewer than 20 percent were comfortable with teaching its tenets in K-12 schools.

Why such ignorance? The news media are part of the story here. Elsewhere on the survey, the researchers asked what types of information sources respondents relied on to learn about what is being taught in schools today. Americans who relied the most on television news and social media were far more likely to believe, wrongly, that CRT embraces colorblind principles. More than 90 percent who said that both sources were major influences on their thinking about these issues made this mistake.

In other words, the manufactured belief that CRT is merely a continuation of civil rights-era efforts to ensure equality of opportunity provides valuable cover for those pushing race-conscious policies and practices that prioritize equity in outcomes.

Bernie Sanders may not know the difference, but Americans deserve to know. ■

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# No Spoiler Alert

**Third-party presidential candidates are always accused of being spoilers. Here's how the right one could bring meaningful change to our moribund politics, even if the candidate doesn't win.**

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***By Morris P. Fiorina***

In 2016, I wrote an op-ed titled “Run, Mike and Jim, Run,” referring to possible third-party candidacies by former New York mayor Michael Bloomberg and former Virginia senator Jim Webb. (The article was published under a less catchy title.) Today, I am even more concerned about the state of American politics than I was then, so I was dismayed to read reports of Democratic and (former) Republican operatives scheming to torpedo the contingency plans of No Labels to give the 2024 electorate an alternative to a choice between President Biden and—what now appears likely—former president Donald Trump. The tens of millions of American disheartened by that choice should welcome the activities of No Labels.

As a result of processes not fully understood, our two parties now contradict decades of political-science scholarship about the centrist tendencies of two-party competition. Historically, such competition produced diverse, “catch-all” parties that competed for the political middle ground. No longer. Our parties now resemble the ideologically distinct parties common in multiparty systems, the critical difference being that the latter generally contain more than two parties. Consequently, such ideological parties are forced to compromise in order

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to form a government. That is not so in the United States today. With only two parties, each one attempts to win full control (a so-called trifecta) by itself.

The United States is the world's largest, most diverse democracy. Our citizens differ in their interests, beliefs, and values. Yet, as I argued in 2016, today's parties bludgeon these differences

into two packages that make no sense to many of us. If a citizen favors lower taxes and less regulation, why should

she have to support restricting abortion, or vice versa? Those are the kinds of restricted choices the two parties offer. Why should Ohio and Oregon Republican candidates emphasize the same issues despite differences in their constituencies' positions and priorities? Ditto for New Mexico and New Jersey Democratic candidates. That is a consequence of nationalized fundraising, among other things.

Why should parties seek to win narrow majorities and impose extreme alternatives on a population that to this day remains considerably more moderate—temperamentally and ideologically—than most of those who occupy the upper echelons of the parties? That is the result of a politics that privileges highly involved but highly unrepresentative activists. And why should the goal of so many in our political class be to destroy the opposition rather than reach an acceptable compromise and move on to address other problems? That is one of several reasons that Americans' trust and confidence in their government have fallen to historic lows.

Contrary to his current view, *New York Times* columnist David Brooks once opined that somewhere in the country there is an “updated, saner” Ross Perot.

That flawed candidate received nearly 20 percent of the popular vote in 1992. With majorities

today opposed to both the Biden and Trump candidacies, a competent, temperamentally moderate third-party candidate—whether center-left or center-right—might well exceed Perot's showing.

Could such a candidate win? Probably not, although the common assertion that third-party candidates can't win the presidency is not quite correct. Candidates in third place usually can't win because their supporters desert them rather than waste their vote. But should one of the two major-party candidates be in third place close to the election, as Bill Clinton was earlier in the summer of 1992, their votes would flow to the top two candidates, one of

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***Today's political parties bludgeon voters' differences into two packages that make no sense to many of us.***

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***Our politics privilege highly involved but highly unrepresentative activists.***



whom is the third-party candidate (e.g., Theodore Roosevelt in 1912). Third-party or independent candidates have won gubernatorial races, of course.

Assuming the more likely possibility that a third-party candidate does not win, many observers seem to believe that a strong third candidate would throw a Biden victory in a two-way race to Trump. The presumption that Biden will beat Trump head-to-

head is overly optimistic.

Both Trump's election in 2016 and even more his defeat in 2020 hinged on knife-edged outcomes

in a handful of states. Absent the pandemic, Trump likely would have beaten Biden in 2020, and recent polls suggest that Trump might win in 2024 even in a two-way race. Domestic or foreign developments in the months to come could alter the situation in key states one way or the other.

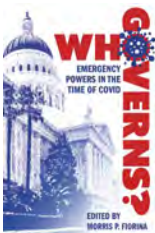
Should a third-party candidate win some electoral votes, commentators warn that the presidential choice would go to the House of Representatives, where the Republicans currently control twenty-five state delegations compared to twenty-three for the Democrats, with two ties. This is an extremely close division that the 2024 elections could change (the new House would choose the president), especially if No Labels could elect a few third-party House candidates. All in all, the notion that a third-party candidacy would give a likely Biden victory to Trump is beset with multiple uncertainties.

We are past the point where we should allow fear of the unknown to dominate fear of the known. The known is that one party offers a candidate whose capacities are trending downwards, backstopped by a running mate who inspires little popular confidence. The other party offers a candidate with no commitment to anything or anyone but himself. Such a choice is unworthy of our country. Run, Joe or Kyrsten or Larry, run! ■

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***We're past the point where we should let fear of the unknown dominate fear of the known.***

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# Medicaid: We Must Do Better

**Medicaid denies poor Americans the best aspects of American health care—the kinds of competitive, high-quality plans that would serve their needs.**

**By Scott W. Atlas**

Medicaid, the government's ever-expanding single-payer insurance for low-income Americans, has ballooned by almost twenty-four million beneficiaries since the onset of the 2020 pandemic. Even though the COVID-19 emergency has officially ended, many elected officials call for further expansion of Medicaid. At what point should we finally heed the advice of Milton Friedman, who observed, "One of the great mistakes is to judge policies and programs by their intentions rather than their results"? Instead of blindly continuing and expanding it, shouldn't we consider the actual access to care and results under Medicaid?

## Key points

- » Socioeconomic differences correlate to health outcomes. Medicaid deprives poor patients of high-quality health care.
- » Most physicians already refuse to accept Medicaid, whose low reimbursement rates limit patients' access to doctors, treatments, medications, and technology.
- » Medicaid should be a bridge to private insurance.

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*Scott W. Atlas is the Robert Wesson Senior Fellow in health policy at the Hoover Institution and participates in Hoover's Health Care Policy Working Group.*

The COVID pandemic re-demonstrated a long-known fact: socioeconomic differences correlate to health outcomes. Broad indicators affected by dozens of factors outside of health care, like life expectancy and infant mortality, are also significantly worse for certain minorities in the United States. Infant mortality rates have been improving in the United States since 1995, with the lowest in history for all races recorded in 2020, but infant mortality rate

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***In study after study, Medicaid patients fare worse than patients with private insurance.***

by race of the mother for blacks (10.38) remains double to triple that of infants born to whites (4.4), Hispanics (4.69), or Asians (3.14). Similarly,

Hispanics and whites have a life expectancy six years longer than blacks, not counting data since the pandemic.

That difference in health outcomes has been put forth as a key reason to expand single-payer health insurance in the United States. An inexplicably ignored logical flaw in that argument is that those very same health disparities for minorities are seen in the countries with the longest history of single-payer health care systems. For instance, in the government-run system of Canada, Inuit and First Nations infant mortality was two to four times that of non-indigenous Canadians and Quebecois. The same goes for the United Kingdom, where black Caribbean and black African infant mortality rates are double those of whites.

## **POOR QUALITY, POOR HEALTH**

The goal should be to increase access to high-quality health care and improve health, not simply to label people as “insured.” But Medicaid patients fare worse than patients using private insurance in study after study—even after standardizing for medical differences among patients. Those bad outcomes include more frequent complications and more deaths in treated cancers, heart procedures, transplants, and major surgeries. The most striking conclusion of a 2013 randomized study in Oregon was that Medicaid fails to improve physical health beyond having no insurance at all.

Another truth hidden from the public is that a large fraction of doctors already don’t accept Medicaid: the average rate of Medicaid acceptance is only 54.1 percent in the surveyed fifteen metropolitan areas. Worse, 51 percent of those doctors with contractual agreements to accept it, in practice do not. This is especially true of family-practice doctors, pediatricians, and psychiatrists, all of whom accept Medicaid patients at far lower rates than

they accept private insurance patients. While private insurance pays over 140 percent of the cost of care, Medicaid pays below the cost of administering the care. Unbeknownst to beneficiaries, that significant underpayment—below the cost of administering those services—limits their access to doctors, treatments, medications, and technology; hence, worse outcomes from disease than private insurance, even for the most serious life-threatening illnesses like cancer and heart disease.

The poor quality of Medicaid, now covering more than eighty-eight million people at a cost of over \$650 billion per year, falls squarely on the shoulders of minorities. In contrast with the nation's demographics of the 250 million adults in the United

States—62 percent are white, 12 percent black, and 17 percent Hispanic—Medicaid users are heavily skewed to

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***The poor quality of Medicaid falls squarely on the shoulders of minorities.***

minorities: 21 percent are black, 40 percent white, and 25 percent Hispanic. Medicaid covers almost thirty million American children; most black kids (57 percent) and most Latino kids (55 percent) depend on Medicaid, whereas only 33 percent of white kids use it.

Instead of shunting poor Americans into a parallel, second-class system with worse health outcomes and far less access to care, let's change Medicaid to a bridge to private insurance. Analogous to expanding school choice for everyone, that would mean adding the same choices of health care, with its superior access and higher-quality outcomes, for the poor as for the rich.

Let's provide private insurance options for all Medicaid enrollees—just like the coverage offered to members of Congress. That should include coverage not bloated by expensive mandates for everything from acupuncture to marriage counseling to wigs to in vitro fertilization; establishing and seeding health savings accounts (HSAs); and providing new incentives for lower-income families to consider quality and price and to seek good health through wellness programs and healthy behavior. These reforms, including fixed federal grants to states, would also change the purpose and culture of Medicaid bureaucrats from running government-administered plans to finding private, high-value coverage for beneficiaries.

And let's be clear: it is worse than arrogant—some might even say racist—to claim that Medicaid beneficiaries are not as capable as congressmen and other elites to seek out good health care for their own families.

Ignoring facts does not change reality. The Office of the Actuary of the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) calculated that most hospitals, skilled nursing facilities, and in-home health care providers already lose money per Medicare patient, and Medicaid pays even less. By 2040, approximately half of hospitals, two-thirds of skilled nursing facilities, and

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***Most hospitals, skilled nursing facilities, and in-home providers already lose money per Medicare patient. Medicaid pays even less.***

more than 80 percent of home health agencies will be operating at a loss, even without any change toward single-payer, because of the influx into Medicare of the aging

population. That did not include the massive expansion of Medicaid over the past three years. Owing to the underpayment, future access to care for those dependent on Medicaid is already at risk and will worsen if government insurance is expanded further.

## **ANTICIPATE THE SHOCK**

We cannot continue to allow government elites to pretend to care about the disadvantaged, yet repeatedly harm low-income families and minorities with their policies. Let's never forget that during COVID's most dangerous time, low-wage earners were deemed "essential workers" and delivered food,

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***Future access to care for those dependent on Medicaid is already at risk. It can only worsen if government insurance expands further.***

staffed pharmacies and grocery stores, cleaned nursing homes and hospitals, drove public transportation—all to serve those who worked from home. Low-wage

earners were required to assume exposure to the deadliest form of the virus, in advance of any vaccine. In shutting down the economy, "low-wage workers experienced much larger, more persistent job losses," as shown by Harvard's Raj Chetty. Over the next twenty years, the unemployment "shock" alone will cause 1.2 million extra American deaths—from the lockdowns, not the virus—disproportionately affecting African-Americans and women.

The time is long overdue for a fundamental overhaul of Medicaid, a program that isolates poor Americans from the excellence of US medical care and forces them to uniquely suffer the brunt of single-payer care. Moreover, it is illogical and morally indefensible to expand a program that is already



not accepted by most doctors, has worse outcomes than the alternative of private insurance, costs hundreds of billions of dollars per year, and is frankly coverage that none of the members of Congress who expanded it would accept as coverage for their own families. ■

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# *This Bud Isn't for You*

**Taxes, regulation, and local politics threaten to snuff out California's legal marijuana industry.**

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**By Bill Whalen**

**T**his year's "420 Day," or April 20, has come and gone. In cannabis culture, "420" is slang for marijuana and hashish consumption. According to the lore, the coinage refers to the time of day when a group of San Rafael high schoolers would meet to smoke in the 1970s. Now that it's been seven years since voters approved Proposition 64 legalizing recreational marijuana use, it seems like a good time to examine the state of California's cannabis industry.

First, a little background on how legalization came to be in America's most populous state. (In all, twenty-three states—along with the District of Columbia and three US territories—have legalized recreational marijuana use.) In 2010, California voters rejected Proposition 19, which would have allowed adults (age twenty-one and over) to possess up to one ounce of marijuana for personal consumption (the intake restricted to nonpublic sites—i.e., homes and cannabis dispensaries). One of the nonsupporters of that measure was then-San Francisco mayor Gavin Newsom, also on the statewide ballot as a candidate for lieutenant governor.

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*Bill Whalen is the Virginia Hobbs Carpenter Distinguished Policy Fellow in Journalism at the Hoover Institution and co-author of **California on Your Mind**, a Hoover online journal. He also moderates Hoover's **GoodFellows** video series.*

Six years later, and preparing for a gubernatorial run, Newsom was not just pro-legalization, but a very public voice in support as he campaigned up and down the state for the passage of Proposition 64, in the process laying the groundwork for his 2018 gubernatorial campaign.

Not that all prominent California Democrats were on board with legalization at the time. Senator Dianne Feinstein was an opponent (she worried about marijuana ads on prime-time TV). Then-governor Jerry Brown likewise wasn't a fan. (Years before, Brown asked: "How many people can get stoned and still have a great state or a great nation?")

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***Gavin Newsom campaigned up and down the state for Proposition 64, in the process laying the groundwork for his 2018 gubernatorial campaign.***

But such skepticism wasn't the case with Newsom, who not only championed the cause but treated it as a "joint venture" (in the political sense) with California's cannabis industry. The future governor went so far as to tell *Billboard* magazine, "Put it this way: Everything that goes wrong, you're looking at the poster child."

## **PROMISES AND PROHIBITION**

As it turned out, plenty did go wrong. That's because Proposition 64 contained at least two design flaws.

First, as is the case with most other states that legalized recreational marijuana, the government in Sacramento ceded control to local jurisdictions. That opened the door to classic California NIMBYism—communities arbitrarily deciding whether to allow marijuana dispensaries and other "weedy" endeavors (for example, "cannabis consumption lounges" that are spread across Los Angeles).

An example of this is Stanford University and upscale Palo Alto. One would think an exclusive private university and a progressive-minded town where median household income hovers around \$200,000 would be prime turf for cannabis. Instead, the city council "just said no" to marijuana dispensaries and weed-related businesses (though deliveries from nearby towns are allowed).

Second, as is true with many aspects of the California existence, the state overdid it on taxes and regulation.

In California, marijuana growers looking to stay on the up-and-up with the state government were asked to pay a cultivation tax of \$9.25 per ounce of

MEDICAL



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OPEN

BUSINESS HO

flowers and \$2.75 per ounce of leaves. On top of that, an additional 15 percent tax was placed on the retail sale of marijuana products.

What soon occurred: a vibrant underground economy (especially in the “Emerald Triangle” in the northwestern corner of the Golden State) in which growers either don’t cooperate with the state or report only a portion of their produce to the state while selling the rest on the black market.

Either way, it means lots of revenue that won’t be going into the state’s coffers. Last year, legal cannabis sales in California reached \$5.3 billion, which was 8 percent less than the previous year, according to the California Department of Tax and Fee Administration, the first decline in such recorded sales.

And the black market? Closer to \$8 billion, some industry analysts claim.

Enter Newsom and the state legislature with a market correction: in 2021, they agreed to kill the weight-based cultivation tax. It was part of a broader package of sweeteners meant to give legal growers a boost (\$20 million for certain storefront retail and microbusinesses; \$20 million for so-called cannabis “equity operators”). Missing from Sacramento’s rush to mend an ailing cannabis industry: reform of the California Environmental Quality Act, whose regulatory hurdles have frustrated legal cannabis growers.

Meanwhile, the powers-that-be in Sacramento also came up with sticks to go along with the carrots. Newsom and lawmakers agreed to five-figure fines and the threat of civil action for individuals caught running noncompliant operations. The governor also created a Unified Cannabis Enforcement Task Force (try this for gubernatorial gobbledygook: a “new multi-agency, cross-jurisdictional task force to better coordinate agencies using a wide array of statutory authorities as they work collectively to strategically address illegal cannabis operations, including transnational criminal organizations”).

***HOW GREEN? California’s legalization of cannabis (opposite) triggered a black-market economy in which growers either don’t cooperate with state taxation and regulation or report only a portion of sales. Billions of dollars are at stake while Sacramento seeks ways to strengthen the legal marijuana industry and suppress the illegal one.*** [Neeta Lind—Creative Commons]



The problem with such an approach: California's G-men are in a situation not unlike the federal agents who waged a losing war against Prohibition nearly a century ago.

In October 2022, for example, members of the state's Department of Cannabis Control's Law Enforcement Division and the California Department of Fish and Wildlife targeted unlicensed outdoor marijuana cultivators in rural Tuolumne County, home to Yosemite. They succeeded in eradicating more than 1,000 illegal cannabis plants and destroyed more than 5,200 pounds of illegally processed cannabis flowers: in all, a retail value of \$15 million. However, that \$15 million seizure constitutes but one-fifth of 1 percent of the estimated \$8 billion illegal market in California.

If economic stimuli and promises of enforcement measures fail to be a cure-all for California's cannabis industry, there's a third avenue currently under consideration:  
create an export market.

In January, officials from California's Department of Cannabis Control sent an eight-page letter to state Attorney General Rob Bonta making

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### ***The \$8 billion illegal market easily outweighs the legal industry.***

the legal argument for California moving cannabis products across state lines. That was

only a few months after Newsom signed a bill establishing criteria for California entering into interstate cannabis commerce pacts.

But moving forward with such pacts assumes agreement from the federal government not to meddle in the states' affairs (an anti-legalization administration, for example, could withhold state funds). And it assumes the Biden administration would give the concept its blessing as a contentious presidential election approaches.

While some surveys show support for marijuana legalization at a record high (no pun intended), it's worth noting that it's not as popular in the crucial swing state of Georgia. While Arizona legalized cannabis in 2020, another swing state, Wisconsin, is something of a nonlegal island.

## **SPUTTERING**

Where does this leave California? For growers, the situation is anything but a euphoric high. According to state data, California has 1,766 fewer cultivation licenses (permission to grow) than it did at the beginning of 2022. Over the same period, California lost 23 percent of its total legal canopy, the combined size of all legal cannabis grown. That translates to about

19 million square feet of cannabis farming—roughly the size of 330 football fields.

Does that mean that the Golden State’s legal cannabis industry is going up in smoke? Probably not. But it is yet another reminder of the perils of smoke-and-mirror ballot measures. ■

*Read California on Your Mind, the online Hoover Institution journal that probes the politics and economics of the Golden State ([www.hoover.org/publications/californiaonyourmind](http://www.hoover.org/publications/californiaonyourmind)). © 2023 The Board of Trustees of the Leland Stanford Junior University. All rights reserved.*



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# *Power Corrupted*

**Citing climate change, central planners in Sacramento and Washington are forcing consumers to pay burdensome energy penalties, to no good end.**

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***By David R. Henderson***

**W**hen I organized a course on energy economics at the Naval Postgraduate School in 2012, I put on the syllabus the story of how I became an energy economist early in my career. Here's an excerpt:

In the late 1970s, I became an energy economist because I saw just how destructive price controls on oil and gasoline were. President Nixon's price controls on oil, which were later affirmed by President Ford and then affirmed by President Carter, caused shortages and line-ups. They also caused the government to intrude heavily in our decisions about energy use. While the price controls were slowly phased out by Carter in his last year in office and then abruptly ended by Reagan in his first month in office, many controls on usage remain. The particularly notable ones are on appliances and, most important, cars and trucks.

That interest in energy economics led me to become the senior economist for energy policy with President Reagan's Council of Economic Advisers.

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*David R. Henderson is a research fellow at the Hoover Institution and an emeritus professor of economics at the Naval Postgraduate School in Monterey.*

If I were my twenty-seven-year-old self today, I would have even more motivation to become an energy economist. The reason is similar: I see both the federal government and various state governments, especially California's, implementing energy policies that will impose huge costs on people but have little effect on what many of those regulations are purported to achieve: reducing or slowing global warming. And, like price controls, these regulations fly in the face of basic economic wisdom.

## WHAT ECONOMICS HAS TO SAY

First, let's consider the reason given for most of the current and proposed regulations: to forestall global warming. I will take as given that global warming will be a problem by the end of this century, although there are reasons to doubt even that.

But with the assumption that it will be a problem, what does economics have to say? A lot, actually.

Many economists argue that the most efficient response to global warming is to tax the use of carbon because burning carbon creates carbon dioxide. But they overlook something:

they haven't proven that reducing carbon usage is the cheapest way of dealing with global

warming. As I have written elsewhere, reducing carbon might be much more expensive than "geoengineering," or technological projects to remove and sequester carbon dioxide.

Another response to global warming—adaptation—also could well be cheaper than carbon taxes.

One thing we know from two centuries of experience is that if governments don't hobble economic growth with high taxes, heavy regulation, heavy restrictions on property rights, and large incursions on the rule of law, we will get economic growth. Adam Smith, whose three hundredth birthday we celebrated earlier this year, put it succinctly:

Little else is requisite to carry a state to the highest degree of opulence from the lowest barbarism, but peace, easy taxes, and a tolerable administration of justice; all the rest being brought about by the natural course of things. All governments which thwart this natural course, which force things into another channel, or which

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***Government-imposed energy policies will create huge costs but do little or nothing to slow climate change.***

endeavour to arrest the progress of society at a particular point, are unnatural, and to support themselves are obliged to be oppressive and tyrannical.

With regular economic growth over even a few decades, virtually all economic classes, including the poorest, are better off. In their 2020 book, *Leave Me Alone and I'll Make You Rich*, economists Deirdre McCloskey and Art Carden estimate that standards of living today in rich nations are thirty times what they were in 1800. The wealthier people are, the more resources they have to allow them to adapt.

Consider, for example, one potential effect of global warming: rising ocean levels. For the past three decades, writes physicist and former Caltech provost Steven E. Koonin in his 2021 book, *Unsettled*, sea levels have risen by 0.12 inches per year. If sea levels continued to rise at that rate, then, by the year 2100, they would be about ten inches higher than now. That is not a large problem, and we have a lot of time to adjust.

Moreover, even in the Netherlands where, a thousand years ago, the vast majority of people were poor by modern standards, people had the resources

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***The wealthier the people, the more resources they have to let them adapt.***

to build dikes to keep the ocean out. Since then, technology has no doubt improved and, as noted above, standards of living are a huge multiple

of what they were a few centuries ago. That means that it should be even easier and more affordable to build dams in, say, Miami, and other low-lying areas.

Another way to adapt is to change where we grow food. Economist David Friedman, writing in his Substack, recently quoted the EPA's statement that "overall, climate change could make it more difficult to grow crops, raise animals, and catch fish in the same ways and same places as we have done in the past." That, he noted, is not the end of the story; although global warming will make currently cultivated land somewhat less productive, it will make land that is closer to the poles more productive. Friedman also points out that people will adjust crops, change the amount of irrigation, and adjust in several other ways. Here is his summary statement about what's wrong with the EPA's approach:

If there is substantial climate change, we will not continue to "raise animals and catch fish"—or grow wheat—"in the same ways

and same places as we have done in the past.” As I commented on the same problem decades ago in response to the book *Limits to Growth*, it is like trying to extrapolate the path of an automobile on the assumption that the driver has his eyes closed.

## WHY REGULATION FAILS

Where economists are united, whether or not they believe in carbon taxes, is on the issue of regulation. When the government dictates which fuels may be used, which fuel usages should be regulated or outright banned, and which technologies should be allowed, it imposes solutions that are costlier than even carbon taxes. The reason is that the government cannot know the value people place on various uses and cannot know all the unintended consequences that will result from its regulations and mandates.

The federal government and the California government, the two I know best, have gone far in the direction of regulation. In 2022, California’s state government announced its plan to ban, effective in 2030, sales of new natural gas water heaters and furnaces. The government wants people to replace natural gas furnaces with heat pumps that are run on electricity. The stated purpose is to reduce emissions. One advocate of heat pumps told the *San Francisco Chronicle* that installing his cost him a cool \$27,000. Moreover, because it runs on electricity, which is very expensive in California, due in part to—you guessed it—regulation, running the heat pump can cost more than using natural gas.

Similarly, if we can’t buy natural gas water heaters, we are stuck with using heaters powered by electricity. What happens if your electricity is cut off? That’s not a hypothetical question. In my part of California, there are many trees. When we get a lot of rain, trees with shallow roots become unstable and a heavy wind can push them over onto power lines. Then the power goes out. Last winter, I calculated, my wife and I were without power for more than a week’s worth of hours. At one point, we had no power for three days.

This raises a more general point: diversification, whether in the stock market or in fuel sources, is generally a good idea. Because we have a gas-fired stove, which regulators in California also want to ban, we could at least use a lit match to light the burner and heat soup.

Both the California state government and the federal government also have put themselves in the position of choosing what kind of vehicles we may drive in the long run. Those governments don’t have information about our individual circumstances, and so they cannot make a good choice for most



of us. If they choose electric cars for people who would buy them already, then they have no effect. But by choosing electric cars for the rest of us, they are overriding all of our considerations and replacing them with their own preferences.

EV mandates also will substantially increase the demand for rare minerals that go into battery production, driving the cost even higher. In a market where people are free to choose, the higher price of EVs would discourage their purchase, causing people to buy more gasoline-powered vehicles than

otherwise. A mandate blunts that natural market constraint.

In the United States and especially in California, governments have used regulation to reduce

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***Governments don't have data about our individual circumstances, so they can't make a good choice for most of us.***

the role of coal, natural gas, and nuclear power to generate electricity and to increase the role of solar and wind power. The California legislature requires electric utilities to purchase 50 percent of their electricity from renewable sources by 2026, 60 percent by 2030, and a whopping 100 percent by 2045. What do coal, natural gas, and nuclear energy have in common? They're incredibly reliable. What do solar and wind power, the two main forms of renewable energy, have in common? They're not. Moreover, because wind and solar are intermittent, we still need a substantial amount of standby capacity that uses natural gas to generate electricity.

A much better solution is to quit mandating how electricity is produced and, furthermore, to radically deregulate nuclear power. Nuclear power is very expensive now, but mainly because it's so highly regulated. People's fear of an accident aside, nuclear is among the safest forms of power.

## **THE BOTTOM LINE**

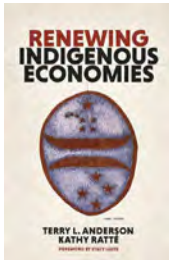
The main problem with government regulation of energy uses and of the forms of energy production is that the government puts itself in the role of central planner. It has neither the information about individuals' values and circumstances nor the incentive to make good decisions. That's why we have such an energy mess in the United States and, especially, in California.

It might make sense to impose a carbon tax. A carbon tax's big advantage over regulation is that it doesn't put the government in the role of picking and choosing uses and sources of power. Those who want to bear the tax and

have a gas guzzler can do so. Electricity producers who want to pay the tax to have a steady source of inputs into power production rather than depending on intermittent wind and solar, can do so.

This is not controversial among economists. Unfortunately, as with price controls during the 1970s, not enough policy makers are paying attention to economists. The results are, and will be, at a minimum, pricey and intermittent electric power and very expensive cars, furnaces, and water heaters. ■

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# *The Man Who Talked Back*

**When COVID struck, public-health officials closed down the country. Hoover fellow Dr. Jay Bhattacharya believed they were making a catastrophic mistake—and said so.**

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**By Peter Robinson**

**Peter Robinson, Uncommon Knowledge:** Beginning in March 2020, more than three years ago, public-health officials locked this country down. One man talked back, arguing that public-health officials were getting the fight against COVID all wrong. That got him into trouble, and he's still in trouble today. Dr. Jay Bhattacharya came to Stanford University at the age of seventeen and has never left. In addition to his undergraduate degree, Dr. Bhattacharya earned a doctorate from the Stanford Economics Department and an MD from Stanford Medical School. Dr. Bhattacharya's now a professor of medicine at Stanford and a fellow at the Hoover Institution. Jay is also one of the three authors of the "Great Barrington Declaration." Jay and his co-authors wrote in that October 2020 document, "We have grave concerns about the damaging physical and mental health impacts of the prevailing COVID-19 policies."

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*Jay Bhattacharya is a senior fellow (by courtesy) at the Hoover Institution and a professor at Stanford University Medical School. Peter Robinson is the editor of the **Hoover Digest**, the host of **Uncommon Knowledge**, and the Murdoch Distinguished Policy Fellow at the Hoover Institution.*



**QUESTIONER:** *Stanford professor Jay Bhattacharya says of the COVID-19 measures, “The people who conceived the lockdowns have an extent of naivete about how societies work that just boggles the mind.” As for his attempts to debate the public-health authorities behind the COVID measures, “the high clerisy of science ... you couldn’t contradict them without being excommunicated.”* [Tom Williams—CQ Roll Call]

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Jay, let’s begin with a clip from your last appearance on this program, which took place on October 13, 2021. My question to you was: what needs to happen?

**Jay Bhattacharya [recorded in 2021]:** I think the first thing that has to happen is that public health should apologize. The public-health establishment in the United States and the world has failed the public.

**Robinson:** “The first thing that has to happen is that public health should apologize.” Dr. Anthony Fauci, now retired but, during the lockdown, the director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, has he apologized?

**Bhattacharya:** No.

**Robinson:** Dr. Francis Collins, again, now retired but, during the lockdown, director of the National Institutes of Health. Has Dr. Collins apologized?

**Bhattacharya:** No, unfortunately.

**Robinson:** Federal public-health officials, state public-health officials, county public-health officials, put them all together, and you get several thousand public-health officials in this country who are responsible for locking counties down, states down, the country down. As far as you're aware, have any of them apologized?

**Bhattacharya:** I think very, very few have acknowledged any errors at all.

**Robinson:** All right, what we know now. Last year, Johns Hopkins performed a survey of the literature on lockdowns. We're defining lockdowns here as government mandates, "such as policies that limit internal movement, close schools and businesses, and ban international travel." The conclusion of the Johns Hopkins study, that, on average, lockdowns caused a reduction in COVID deaths of only two-tenths of 1 percent, does that sound right? And if the benefit of locking down the country was a reduction in COVID deaths of two-tenths of 1 percent, what do we know now about the costs?

**Bhattacharya:** Peter, it is absolutely right. I don't know the specific number, but the magnitude of the protective effect of the lockdowns, if it's not zero, it's very, very close to zero. And for a very simple reason, you can see why it's right. The lockdowns, if they were to benefit anybody, benefited members of the laptop class who actually had the wherewithal to stay home, stay safe while the rest of the population served them. Our societies are deeply unequal. It's a very small

fraction of the world population that actually could stay home and stay safe. And so, when the lockdowns happened, a very large number of people

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***"The lockdowns, if they were to benefit anybody, benefited members of the laptop class."***

essentially were left on the outside. They had to work to feed their families, to take care of their elderly parents or whatnot, and that meant that the lockdowns had no chance of actually working. The people who conceived the lockdowns have an extent of naiveté about how societies work that just boggles the mind.

And you asked me about the harms from the lockdowns. They're tremendous, and we're still just beginning to count them. So domestically, for instance, I think there's now a broad consensus that the lockdowns harmed our children. In many places, including California, children did not see the inside of a physical classroom for nearly a full year and a half. The consequences of that play themselves out with deep learning loss. By the way, it's concentrated on minorities and poor populations who didn't have the wherewithal to replace

the lost in-classroom learning, but it plays itself out over a long period of time. The social-science literature from before the pandemic documented in detail about how valuable investments in education are for the health of children. If you deprive children of education for even short periods of time, it turns out it leads to a lifetime of lower income, worse health, even shorter lifespans.

One estimate from early in the pandemic, published by the editor of *JAMA Pediatrics*, found that just the

spring lockdowns in the United States alone cost our children 5.5 million life years in expectation. That's yet to come, but it's coming. The toll on skipped cancer screenings, again, the full extent is yet to come. In the poorer parts of the world, the consequences have been absolutely devastating, something like 100 million people thrown into dire poverty. The estimate from the World Food Program is that one hundred million people were put into dire food insecurity, near starvation. And the children in poor countries . . . I'll just take Uganda as an example. They don't have Zoom schools. They just had no school for two years, unless, again, they were in the laptop class. Four and a half million Ugandan kids never came back to school. We're in a situation where the harms of the lockdowns are becoming clearer and clearer every day, and the benefits, in terms of protecting people from COVID . . . it's becoming clearer that they did none of that.

**Robinson:** In March 2020, as the lockdowns were being announced, you felt uneasy about them immediately. This leads me to the study that you conducted, a seroprevalence study right here in Santa Clara County. You discovered that the population was already much more infected with COVID than public-health authorities had understood. What happened?

**Bhattacharya:** That study, which I was the senior author on in early April 2020, found that about 3 percent of Santa Clara County had antibodies already. There were several implications. One is that the mortality rate from the disease was much lower than people were saying. The World Health

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***“If you deprive children of education for even short periods of time, it turns out it leads to a lifetime of lower income, worse health, even shorter lifespans.”***

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***“Four and a half million Ugandan kids never came back to school.”***



Organization had already said that the mortality rate was 3 or 4 percent. It was technically something called a case fatality rate. That is a deeply misleading number. Three or 4 percent of people who get COVID do not die from COVID. What that seroprevalence study found was that it was 0.2 percent, so two out of a thousand. Now, that's still a big number. It's not the flu. We also found a very, very steep age gradient. Children just didn't die at very high rates from COVID, especially healthy children—one in a million, on that order—whereas older people had much higher rates of death from COVID.

Another implication is that . . . it's 3 percent, right? Very infectious disease. That means we still have a long way to go before the pandemic's over. We did a very similar study in LA County the next week and then another, more nationwide study. What we found in LA was 4 percent prevalence of infection. Four percent of the LA County adult population had evidence of having had COVID already and recovered.

**Robinson:** By the way, if I may add, in subsequent weeks and months the findings of these studies would be confirmed again and again and again and again.

**Bhattacharya:** One hundred-plus studies like this.

## SHUTTING DOWN DISAGREEMENT

**Robinson:** There's more to that story, but people will read that in the book you're going to write sooner or later; if I have anything to do with it, sooner. I'm going to quote from the Great Barrington Declaration, which you co-authored with two others: "As infectious-disease epidemiologists and public-health scientists, we have grave concerns about the damaging physical and mental health impacts of the prevailing COVID-19 policies, and recommend an approach that we call focused protection." Instead of shutting the country down, you focus on people who are at risk, particularly older people, because of this age gradient you discovered. Very soon, Dr. Francis Collins, director of the National Institutes of Health (NIH), spoke to the *Washington Post* about the declaration, saying: "This is a fringe component of epidemiology. This is not mainstream science. It's dangerous." Still later, Dr. Collins said on *Fox News*, "Hundreds of thousands of people would have died if we had followed that strategy." Jay, what's going on here?

**Bhattacharya:** We wrote this Great Barrington Declaration in October 2020. We had already tried the lockdown in March and April of 2020, and the disease had come back. The effective implied promise is two weeks to flatten the curve and then we can figure out what to do about the disease, on the basis, it turns out, of advice from people like Francis Collins and Tony Fauci to prominent

government actors, including President Trump. The lockdown strategy, in part, was a reaction to observations of what happened in China in January of 2020. The Chinese had locked down their society, especially Wuhan and Hubei province around it, and American bureaucrats, like Tony Fauci, looked at this and thought, “OK, what the Chinese did worked. We need to do it, too.”

**Robinson:** How did they know that it worked? They believed Chinese data?

**Bhattacharya:** Yes. They’d already staked their reputations on this strategy. And why “fringe epidemiology”? The problem was that you had thousands and thousands of scientists—Stanford, Harvard, Oxford—saying that what they were doing, their strategy, was a mistake, that there was no scientific consensus in favor of their strategy.

**Robinson:** And by the way, when you say thousands and thousands of scientists—you put up the Great Barrington Declaration online and invited anyone who wanted to associate with it to sign, and you did have thousands and thousands of signatures. [*937,000 as of summer 2023—ed.*]

**Bhattacharya:** It wasn’t actually a fringe idea. In fact, it was the standard policy for how to manage respiratory-virus pandemics that we’d followed for a century. If you go back to March of 2020, you can see op-eds in the *New York Times*, in the *Washington Post*, and elsewhere by leading epidemiologists that look, for all the world, like the Great Barrington Declaration. It’s the least original thing I ever worked on in my entire life, Peter. The problem for Tony Fauci and Francis Collins was that they had to solve a PR problem. You have prominent scientists saying, “Look, what these guys are doing is not actually the right strategy.” That normally should have led to a debate, a discussion, some sort of conversation, because if you’re going to implement a policy as devastating as a lockdown, you actually need to have scientific consensus. It’s not OK to say that we should lock society down when only a part of scientists agree with it, especially when it’s clear it didn’t work just a few months earlier, and it was already clear that it had caused a lot of damage a few months earlier.

They had to make us into fringe characters, fringe actors—destroy us, destroy our reputations, so they didn’t have to have that debate. They needed to create an illusion of scientific consensus.

**Robinson:** So, in that incident, we’re not discussing science. We’re discussing brutal bureaucratic politics.

**Bhattacharya:** Yes, it’s hubris.

## A SECRET BLACKLIST

**Robinson:** You joined Twitter in 2021. Your first tweet, you linked to an article that you had recently written on age-based risks, and you tweet, “Mass testing is lockdown by stealth.” Very briefly, what’s the argument there?

**Bhattacharya:** Mass testing of children so that they stay out of school. You test someone who’s come in contact with a child, and you keep the child out of school for five, seven, however many days until you’re certain the kid’s negative. That essentially is a lockdown of that child, even though they’re actually at lower risk of spreading the disease in the population. You already had, in spring 2020, evidence from Sweden, which kept schools for kids under sixteen entirely open: not one child died that spring from COVID, and teachers were actually at lower risk of COVID than the population of other workers at large.

**Robinson:** And you continue to tweet. And then, late last year, Elon Musk takes over Twitter and the company releases internal e-mails and documents, showing, among other things, that you had been intentionally censored. Not long after that, Elon Musk gets in touch and says, “Come on up here to headquarters and take a look.” What did you see?

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***“They had to make us into fringe characters, fringe actors—destroy us, destroy our reputations, so they didn’t have to have that debate. They needed to create an illusion of scientific consensus.”***

**Bhattacharya:** It was surreal, Peter. The blacklist they had put me on was insidious. The purpose of my going on Twitter was to engage with people who hadn’t heard of my message or about lockdowns or

COVID policy, who maybe disagreed with me. The blacklist made sure that my tweets, my message, never reached that audience. It only reached people who already followed me.

**Robinson:** And Twitter was banning you on its own initiative?

**Bhattacharya:** I don’t know for certain, but I very strongly suspect that it was government actors that had me on a blacklist. There’s a lawsuit by the Missouri and Louisiana attorney generals’ offices against the Biden administration. We have deposed Tony Fauci, aides to the surgeon general, aides to Jen Psaki, the former communications director of the White House. We’ve

found direct instructions and threats from the White House and many agencies within Health and Human Services to Twitter and other social media companies. Essentially threatening them unless they censored people and ideas that they didn't like.

When I met with Elon, I saw it with my own eyes. It literally said, "Blacklist." I saw prominent media people asking for tweets of mine to be brought down, for me to be censored. It was a striking thing to know that there were actors in the media environment and in the government who wanted to silence me.

## BETTER MODELS

**Robinson:** Now we come to what we ought to learn. There was a study of three states last spring by the Paragon Health Institute. It used an index of state responses to COVID that were created at Oxford University, so we have an objective set of indexing. Illinois, for example, has an average score. California, which imposed some of the harshest lockdowns, has a high score. Florida, which imposed lockdowns, but only very briefly and then opened up almost entirely, has a low score. The finding, after adjusting for age and disease, California, Illinois, and Florida: "all three states had roughly equal outcomes, suggesting that there was no substantial health benefit to more severe lockdowns. Florida, however, easily surpassed California and Illinois in educational and economic outcomes." The kids went to school. The economy remained open. You campaigned against lockdowns throughout COVID. You have no reason to regret that?

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***"I very strongly suspect that it was government actors that had me on a blacklist."***

**Bhattacharya:** No, I think that was the right thing to do. I'm not, by nature, an activist.

But every aspect of lockdown just fills me with . . . It has nothing to do with science. It's damaging to the poor. It's damaging to kids in ways that public policy never ought to have done, and we did it out of ignorance and fear and hubris. You know, the all-cause excess deaths in Sweden are something like 3 percent. It's among the very, very lowest in all of Europe.

**Robinson:** And Sweden did not lock down. Schools stayed open.

**Bhattacharya:** Very famously.

**Robinson:** The economy continued to function.

**Bhattacharya:** And they have lower mortality than locked-down Germany, locked-down UK, locked-down France. It's almost no excess deaths. Imagine that. Imagine if we'd followed a policy like Sweden's. We could have avoided all the harm to our children. We could have avoided all the suffering caused by the lockdowns: the closed businesses, the unemployment, all of that, the economic harm, where we'd spend trillions of dollars—the inflation is a consequence of the lockdowns—and still protected our people better from COVID.

## A QUEST FOR HONESTY

**Robinson:** So, the question remains: how do we do better next time around?

**Bhattacharya:** I think the head of the FDA, Robert Califf, did an interview with some public radio station saying that misinformation is the number one cause of death. It is irresponsible in the extreme and depressing to watch. The problem is, if you don't have an honest evaluation of what happened and the disaster that happened, this will happen again.

**Robinson:** The lockdowns are largely imposed by county and state officials, and now, some twenty states have enacted laws that curtail the powers of those health officials. The laws vary from state to state, but they require public-health officials to narrow the scope of their actions to achieve specific health purposes. They call for expedited judicial review of such actions, and they ensure that actions will automatically expire after a certain period of time. Is that a good idea?

**Bhattacharya:** Yes. I think the problem is that you have the CDC, which issues guidance; the NIH, which issues proclamations from on high, I guess, of who's fringe and who's not; and then the local and state officials essentially respond as if it were Holy Writ. It's not formal regulation that's been subject to public comment or whatever. It's just a CDC guidance. But during the pandemic, these kinds of guidance were used in court cases to defend indefensible things—lockdowns, closures of businesses—that had no real justification.

**Robinson:** And in most cases, that public-health official is appointed, not elected. Most people have never even heard of them, and suddenly, it emerges that they have . . . I'm going to say dictatorial powers. You have to live a certain way because they say so, and there's no redress. Does it bother you that it's only twenty states?

**Bhattacharya:** Public health, when it is partisan, is failed public health. It's not like politics. You can't just win 50 percent plus one and say you've

done a successful job in public health. You need 95 percent of the public to honor and respect what you're saying or else you've failed, because public health is for everybody. I'm in favor of the laws, and I wish that those laws were extended to the rest of the states. At that point, public-health officials couldn't act as dictators. They would have to reason with the public and tell them, "Look, here's the evidence for why we're asking you to do this," and if they're persuasive, the public would agree. In Sweden, 95 percent of people trust Swedish public health because they were honest about their mistakes, honest about their reasoning. They treated adults like adults.

**Robinson:** What still could be done?

**Bhattacharya:** The response is coming. It's unfortunate that we haven't had an honest evaluation. The extent of harm to people is so much that it demands a political response, and what form it will take I don't know. The fact that public health did not actually end up protecting people, it ended up harming people—that demands a political response, which, I think, will inevitably come.

I just did this document with several of my friends, called the "Norfolk Group Blueprint." It's a blueprint for what an honest COVID commission would do, the questions

it would ask, so I'm going to work very hard on that. I still would like to

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***"Public health, when it is partisan, is a failed public health."***

be a scholar. I am still interested in some of the research questions. I think it's very clear from how scientific institutions responded to COVID that science is fundamentally broken.

I think [Great Barrington Declaration co-signer] Martin Kulldorff put it well. During COVID, it felt like science had entered a dark age. Even though there were all these advances, at the same time, you couldn't say something that the powers that be, the high clerisy of science . . . you couldn't contradict them without being excommunicated. We can't have scientific institutions operate that way and still have public confidence in science or expect science to produce the kinds of advances it has. So, I'm going to work toward reform of scientific institutions so those kinds of things don't happen again. ■







# *A Grievous Error, Corrected*

**Race-based college admissions violate the Constitution. The Supreme Court—and the nation—have now ended a long deviation from American values.**

**By Robert J. Delahunty and John Yoo**

In every area of life, the Constitution and federal civil rights laws forbid the government from using race in making decisions. Government cannot use race to distribute government funds, provide benefits, deploy police, run prisons or hospitals, or even protect the nation's security through "racial profiling." But the Supreme Court carved out

## **Key points**

- » In June, the Supreme Court finally cut a cancer out of constitutional law.
- » Even if colleges resist, litigants will keep up pressure on the universities to purge their selection procedures of hidden, as well as overt, racial preferences.
- » The court restored the principle of "strict scrutiny," in which government must show a "compelling" interest in interceding.

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one area from this fundamental colorblind principle. In *Grutter v. Bollinger* (2003), the justices created a special exception for admissions to colleges and universities. A majority in *Grutter* accepted the claim that colleges could use racial diversity as a proxy for intellectual diversity—which relies upon the stereotyping assumption that a student’s mindset depends on his or her race.

In June, in *Students for Fair Admissions v. Harvard*, the Supreme Court finally cut this cancer out of constitutional law. In a monumental 6–3 opinion authored by Chief Justice John Roberts, the court invalidated the race-linked admissions programs maintained by Harvard and the University of North Carolina. The court affirmed the foundational constitutional principle of equality under the law, regardless of race. If the court’s decision is respected and enforced, it is unlikely that any race-linked college-admissions program in any public university or federally funded private university would survive. It is quite likely that no faculty hiring or promotion in which race played a part will be legally permissible. The one sector in American society that had been exempt from legal rules banning the use of race—higher education—will be forced to transform itself.

Do not expect the universities to comply meekly with the court’s ruling. Many of them had been planning how to evade the expected decision even before it came down. But even if massive resistance is likely (as it was with the Warren court’s desegregation orders in the 1950s), litigants will keep up the pressure on the universities to purge their selection procedures of hidden, as well as overt, racial preferences. And the court has laid out clear and firm guidelines for the lower courts to follow in adjudicating those cases. Racial preferences—and any subterfuges designed to conceal such preferences—are forbidden.

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***The one part of American society that had been exempt from legal rules banning the use of race will be forced to transform itself.***

Several justices in the *SFFA* majority have long held racial preferences in their crosshairs. “It is a sordid business, this divvying us up by race,” Roberts wrote in a 2007 case denying race-conscious policies in K–12 schools. “The way to stop discrimination on the basis of race is to stop discriminating on the basis of race.” The late Justice Antonin Scalia had even harsher words for race-based affirmative action: “Discrimination on the basis of race is illegal, immoral, unconstitutional, inherently wrong, and destructive of democratic

society.” And according to the court’s sharpest critic of racial preferences, Justice Clarence Thomas, “every time the government places citizens on racial registers and makes race relevant to the provision of burdens or benefits, it demeans us all.”

In reaching its stunning conclusion, the court did not expressly overturn any precedent (though it certainly disemboweled *Grutter*). Rather, it reaffirmed a standard of judicial review—“strict scrutiny”—for racial classifications that traces back to its decisions in the 1940s and that it has ostensibly

applied since then. Strict scrutiny permits the use of race only when (a) the government has a “compelling” interest and (b) nothing other than the use of race provides a

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**Chief Justice Roberts wrote in 2007, “The way to stop discrimination on the basis of race is to stop discriminating on the basis of race.”**

means to achieve that objective. Judged by that standard, nearly all governmental reliance on race is invalid. (There might be incidental exceptions, like keeping certain statistics, say, for public-health purposes.) The strict-scrutiny standard, if honestly applied, ensures that our Constitution is colorblind. Throughout the civil rights era, judges and lawyers would quip that strict scrutiny is strict in theory, but fatal in fact. Beginning in the late 1970s, however, cases like *Bakke*, *Grutter*, and *Fisher v. University of Texas* purportedly applied strict scrutiny, but in fact used a much more lenient standard toward admissions policies. In June, the court returned to the classic interpretation of strict scrutiny.

## **A LONG, INFAMOUS STRUGGLE**

The colorblindness principle is a keystone of the American Constitution, as the court’s opinion, and the historic concurring opinion of Thomas, demonstrate at length. That principle found its roots in the Declaration of Independence and the abolitionist movement, triumphed in the Emancipation Proclamation and the Reconstruction amendments, and overcame legalized segregation with *Brown v. Board of Education* and the civil rights movement.

“The Constitution, as well as the Declaration of Independence, and the sentiments of the founders of the Republic, give us a platform broad enough, and strong enough, to support the most comprehensive plans for the freedom and elevation of all the people of this country, without regard to color, class, or clime,” Frederick Douglass declared in criticizing the infamous *Dred Scott* decision. As Justice Harlan famously wrote in dissent in *Plessy v. Ferguson*,

which upheld racial segregation: “Our Constitution is colorblind, and neither knows nor tolerates classes among citizens. In respect of civil rights, all citizens are equal before the law.” Or, as Scalia put it pithily in his *Adarand Constructors v. Peña* concurrence, “in the eyes of government, we are just one race here. It is American.”

The decision to prohibit the universities’ use of race will, as a matter of constitutional law, mark the end of the Supreme Court’s misbegotten deviation from colorblind-

ness. The court has steadily banned racial discrimination in every other part of public life.

In *Brown v. Board of*

*Education*, the court began dismantling the pernicious government policy of segregated schools. It recited arguments that pressed the “fundamental contention” that “no State has any authority under the equal-protection clause of the Fourteenth Amendment to use race as a factor in affording educational opportunities among its citizens.” (Thomas’s opinion repeatedly cites the government’s brief in the *Brown* case, in which the Eisenhower administration emphatically endorsed the colorblindness principle.) *City of Richmond v. J. A. Croson* made clear that the Fourteenth Amendment’s insistence on colorblindness prohibited state and local governments from considering race when spending money or awarding contracts. Justice Sandra Day O’Connor’s opinion explained that racial preferences present the serious “danger that a racial classification is merely the product of unthinking stereotypes or a form of racial politics.” Then, in *Adarand Constructors v. Peña*, the court made it crystal clear that this bar also applied to the federal government.

In standing up for the colorblind Constitution, the Supreme Court has finally closed the book on its own unfortunate history with race. In *Dred Scott v. Sandford* (1857), the court’s first effort to solve the nation’s race problem proved a disaster. Chief Justice Roger Taney thought he could head off a looming division between North and South by striking down the Missouri Compromise, holding that blacks could never become US citizens, and forbidding congressional regulation of slavery in the territories. By departing from the Constitution in the name of enlightened elite opinion, Taney only hastened the coming of the Civil War.

The court disgraced itself again in its next major encounter with race, *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896). *Plessy* upheld not just the concept of “separate but equal” but also the right of governments to enact policies based on race,

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***The court has steadily banned racial discrimination in every other part of public life.***

thereby ushering in the Jim Crow era. In yet a third case, *Korematsu v. United States*, the court, despite adopting the strict-scrutiny standard, allowed the internment of Japanese-American citizens during World War II because the government assumed that their ethnicity indicated disloyalty.

The court sought to restore its reputation in *Brown v. Board of Education*, which finally put an end to segregation in public schools. It undertook the difficult work of uprooting de jure racism in area after area, from public facilities to employment to government contracts. The elected branches also sought to end official racism, with President Harry Truman desegregating the military, President Dwight D. Eisenhower helping enforce *Brown*, President John F. Kennedy prohibiting racial discrimination by government contractors, and Congress enacting the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965.

## THE PERILS OF “DIVERSITY”

Unfortunately, however, the pursuit of racial equality and integration has mutated into a new ideology of racial diversity. Both now and in the past, the court has allowed the use of race to remedy discrimination experienced by identifiable victims. But in the context of higher education, where many minority applicants by the 1990s had neither suffered the direct effects of segregation nor been victims of discrimination themselves, racial diversity became an end in itself.

Justice Lewis F. Powell’s 1978 *Bakke* opinion defended racial diversity as a way of promoting intellectual diversity in classroom discussion—a laudable end aligned with the First Amendment values of free speech and open

inquiry. But anyone familiar with American campuses today can see that free and open debate is getting harder to find. Even liberal academics, like former Yale Law School dean Anthony

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***By the 1990s, when many minority applicants had neither suffered the direct effects of segregation nor been victims of discrimination, racial diversity became an end in itself.***

Kronman in his book *The Assault on American Excellence* (2019), acknowledge and deplore the corrupting effects of the post-*Bakke* pursuit of racial diversity for its own sake.

The *Bakke* court split 4–4 between the justices who would have upheld the constitutionality of a quota for admission to a state medical school and four who would have struck it down. Powell provided the decisive fifth vote, ruling

that the school's racial set-aside was not constitutional but also upholding the "Harvard Plan" as a model of constitutionally permissible racial preferences. Powell's argument pivoted on distinguishing a numerical "quota" from a "goal": race could be considered as a "plus factor" in the admissions process because it would contribute to creating greater "diversity" of opinion in the student body. It was said to be a harmless feature of admissions policy, like upgrading a candidate by a notch for being a saxophone player. Powell erroneously maintained that all this was compatible with strict scrutiny. In *Grutter*, a majority of the court tracked Powell's *Bakke* opinion, declared the time-limited use of race in college admissions, and hoped that such preferences would last no more than twenty-five years.

The Harvard template for racial preferences that was allowed under *Bakke* is now ruled illegal under *SFFA*.

Nonetheless, history suggests that even the clear holding in *SFFA*—like *Brown* nearly seventy years ago—will be, to paraphrase Winston Churchill, not the beginning of the end, but the end of the beginning. Massive resistance may arise from an entrenched educational bureaucracy that elevates diversity above all other values, including excellence and merit. Here, just as in *Brown*, parents and students—who overwhelmingly reject racial preferences—will not be able to eliminate the use of skin color in one fell swoop, but only after a series of cases across the nation.

Striking down the admissions programs at Harvard and UNC is thus the easy part. Both schools admitted that they use overt racial

preferences. And the undisputed factual record in both cases confirmed that racial preferences affected admissions decisions. At Harvard, Asian-American applicants had lower acceptance rates than did white students at every academic decile. An Asian-American applicant at the fourth-lowest decile had less than a 1 percent chance of being admitted, while an African-American applicant in the fourth-lowest decile had a 12.8 percent chance. African-Americans in that fourth-lowest decile had the same chance of admission as an Asian-American applicant in the top decile of applicants (12.7 percent). The numbers at UNC were equally striking.

The campaign to enforce the colorblindness principle will not end here. Many (though by no means all) universities are as committed to using race in

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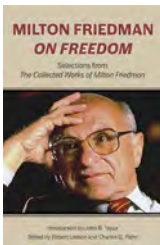
***Massive resistance may arise from an entrenched educational bureaucracy that elevates diversity above all other values, including excellence and merit.***



admissions as ever. The history of resistance to *Brown* suggests that universities will respond to a loss at the Supreme Court not by abandoning their goal of an ideal racial balance but by covertly pursuing the same end through less obvious means. Instead of openly considering skin color in admissions, universities will shift gears to achieve the same racial proportions through facially neutral proxies. Colleges will disguise their use of race behind pretexts such as personality and leadership scores, as Harvard tried to do. At the end of his opinion, Roberts tries to extinguish some of these brush fires before they can start.

Racial discrimination has been a deep stain on our country's history and a betrayal of its founding principles. But the constitutional solution to overcoming racism is not to perpetuate it under the guise of helping those once harmed. As Thomas concludes in his concurrence, we must share the "enduring hope that this country will live up to its principles so clearly enunciated in the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution of the United States: that all men are created equal, are equal citizens, and must be treated equally before the law." ■

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# *The Wages of Victimhood*

**Reparations for slavery, like countless other failed government programs for black Americans, would ignore the real problems.**

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***By Shelby Steele***

**B**lack Americans endured four centuries of an especially mean and degrading persecution. Slavery, and the regime of segregation that followed it, was dawn-to-dusk, cradle-to-grave oppression. No contemporary offer of reparation could ever undo that.

But since the 1960s, we blacks have been all but overwhelmed with social programs and policies that seek to reparate us. Didn't the 1964 Civil Rights Act launch an era of reparation in America?

And didn't that era continue with President Lyndon B. Johnson's Great Society and War on Poverty, two sweeping excursions into social engineering that he hoped would "end poverty in our time"? Then there was school busing for integration, free public housing, racial preferences in college admissions, affirmative action in employment, increasingly generous welfare payments, and so on.

More recently, in American institutions of every kind, there has emerged a new woke language of big-hat-no-cattle words like "equity," "inclusion," "intersectionality," "triggers," "affinity spaces," "allies," and of course, the

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*Shelby Steele is the Robert J. and Marion E. Oster Senior Fellow at the Hoover Institution.*

all-purpose “diversity,” today both a mandate and a brand. America has had some sixty years of what might be called reparational social reform—reform meant to uplift not only the poor but especially those, like black Americans,

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***America has already had sixty years of what might be called reparational social reform.***

government programs has failed to lift black Americans to anything like parity with whites. By almost every important measure—educational achievement, out-of-wedlock births, homeownership, divorce rates—blacks are on the losing end of racial disparities. The reparational model of reform, in which governments and institutions try to uplift the formerly oppressed, has failed.

But why such immense failure in a post-’60s America that has only grown more repentant of its racist past? The answer, I think, is that the Great Society was profoundly disingenuous. It was a collection of reparational reforms meant to show an America finally delivered from the tarnish of its long indulgence in racism. The Great Society was a gigantic virtue signal. It was moral advertising when the times called for the hard work of adapting a long-oppressed people to the demands of the modern world.

But an even greater barrier to black development turned out to be freedom itself. In the mid-’60s, when the civil rights movement and Martin Luther King Jr. were staples on the evening news, we black Americans stepped into a vastly greater freedom than anything we had ever known. King’s rhetoric—“Great God Almighty, we’re free at last”—portrayed freedom as heaven. But freedom also had to have been scary. Oppression had conditioned us to

whose poverty meets  
the bar of historical  
grievance.

Today we can see what  
we couldn’t in the 1960s:  
that this vast array of

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***The Great Society was a gigantic virtue signal. It was moral advertising when the times called for hard work.***

collision with freedom—its intimidating burden of responsibility, its terror of the unknown, its risk of humiliation—that pressured black Americans, especially the young, into a terrible mistake.

In segregation we had longed for a freedom grounded in democratic principles. In the ’60s we won that point. But then suddenly, with the ink still

suppress our humanity, to  
settle ourselves into a per-  
manent subjugation. Not  
the best preparation for a  
full life in freedom.

I believe it was this

wet on the Civil Rights Act, a new voice of protest exploded onto the scene, a voice of race and color and atavistic longing: “black power.”

To accommodate, we shifted the overriding focus of racial protest in America from rights and laws to identity. Today, racial preferences are used everywhere in American life. Identity is celebrated almost as profusely as freedom once was.

It all follows a simple formula: add a history of victimization to the identity of any group, and you will have created entitlement. Today’s black identity is a victim-focused identity designed to entitle blacks in American life. By the terms of this identity, we blacks might be called “citizen-victims” or “citizens with privileges.”

The obvious problem with this is that it baits us into a life of chasing down privileges like affirmative action. In broader America, this only makes us sufferers for want of privileges. Reparation can never be more than a dream of privilege. ■

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# *To Equality*

**Equality of opportunity, a fundamental American value, has long been under attack. Why it must be preserved.**

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***By David Davenport***

Americans have consistently said they believe in the principle of equality of opportunity. As the authors of a Brookings Institution study on the subject concluded: “Americans believe in opportunity. . . . They are far more interested in equal opportunity than in equal results.” These days, however, that notion is under constant challenge and even attack. Indeed, there are suggestions that it be scrapped and replaced with newer ideas such as “equity” or equality of outcome. Equality of opportunity is also challenged on the policy front, with proposed new economic and social plans that would move America down a very different path.

### **OPPORTUNITY VS. OUTCOME**

The argument today seems to be that if equality of opportunity was once the goal, it is no longer enough. In the 2020 presidential campaign, vice presidential candidate Kamala Harris called for this kind of change, saying in a campaign video about equality that “we should all end up at the same place.” She argued that if two people had the same opportunity, but began from different starting points, the results would not be equal. Equality of outcomes has experienced a renewal of interest during the social-justice

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*David Davenport is a research fellow (emeritus) at the Hoover Institution and a senior fellow at the Ashbrook Center.*

movements of the 2020s. For example, Kent State professor of African-American history Elizabeth M. Smith-Pryor has written that equality of opportunity may have worked for whites but is a myth for blacks, calling for “equality of results” as “a more concrete response to our current yet long-standing crisis.”

There is also a lively argument about the extent to which different outcomes are necessarily unfair or are created by unfairness. Economists have pointed out, for example, that much of the gap in earnings between white and black workers is explained by variables such as education, test scores, and work experience. If, as labor economist Harry Holzer suggested, “differences in educational attainment and test scores together may account for most of the racial differences in earnings,” that would suggest a different policy approach from trying to equalize bottom-line incomes.

Then there are questions of fairness in a system of equality of outcomes. Equality of outcomes requires that individuals and groups of people be treated *unequally*, giving

more to some and less to others, taking from some to give to others.

Does government really belong in the business

of taking money from someone who devoted his or her life to developing a particular talent or career and giving it to someone who did not make such a commitment?

Is pursuing equality of outcomes consistent with the American understanding of liberty as well as equality? Is America ready to trade in being “the land of opportunity,” still sought after by millions of immigrants, in order to pursue only equality? Should government be in the business of equalizing people’s economic or social status and could it even accomplish that if it sought to do so?

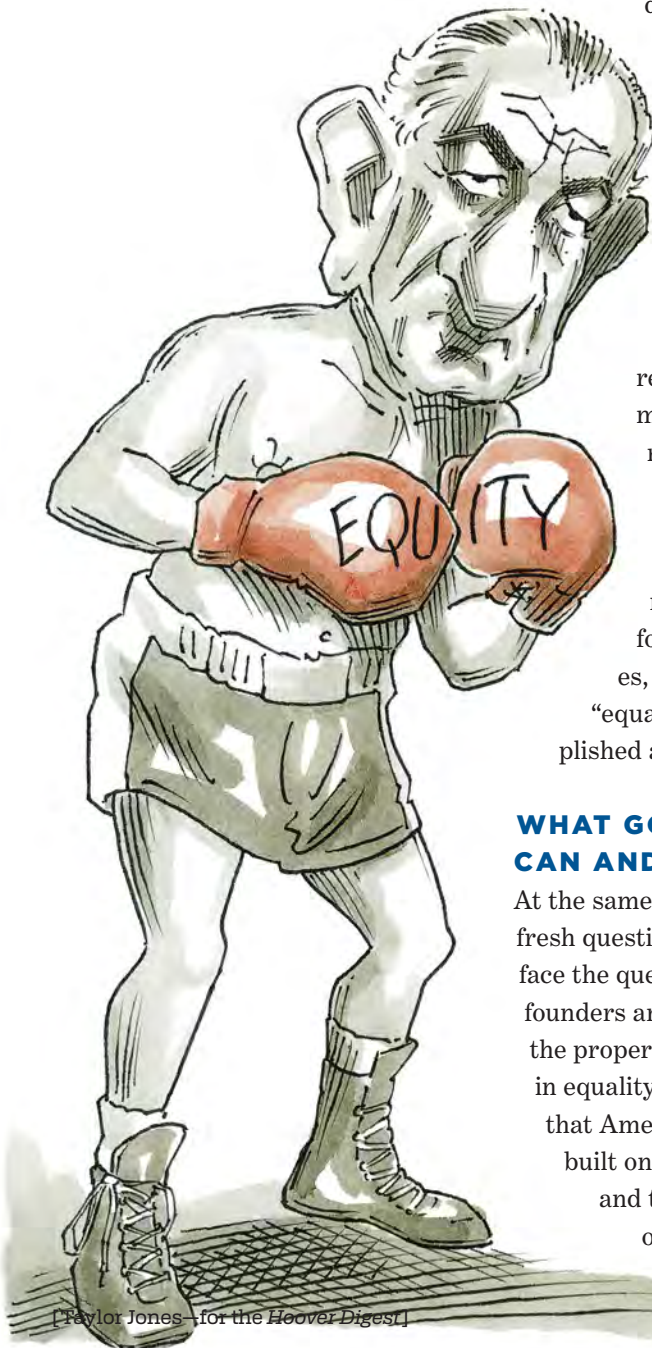
A more current debate, but one that follows similar lines of argument, concerns equity. Equity seems to be the new code word to describe the pursuit of a more just society and the new replacement for equality of opportunity as a goal. We need “equity” for people of color, for women, for transgender individuals, and others—these are the claims of the day. Some say we need it because equality of opportunity is no longer sufficient. Others say we need both equality and equity.

The increasing and current use of the term *equity* is puzzling because it is not clear what it means or how it may be different, if it is, from equality.

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***To the American people, equality of opportunity is the very definition of the American dream.***





[Taylor Jones—for the Hoover Digest]

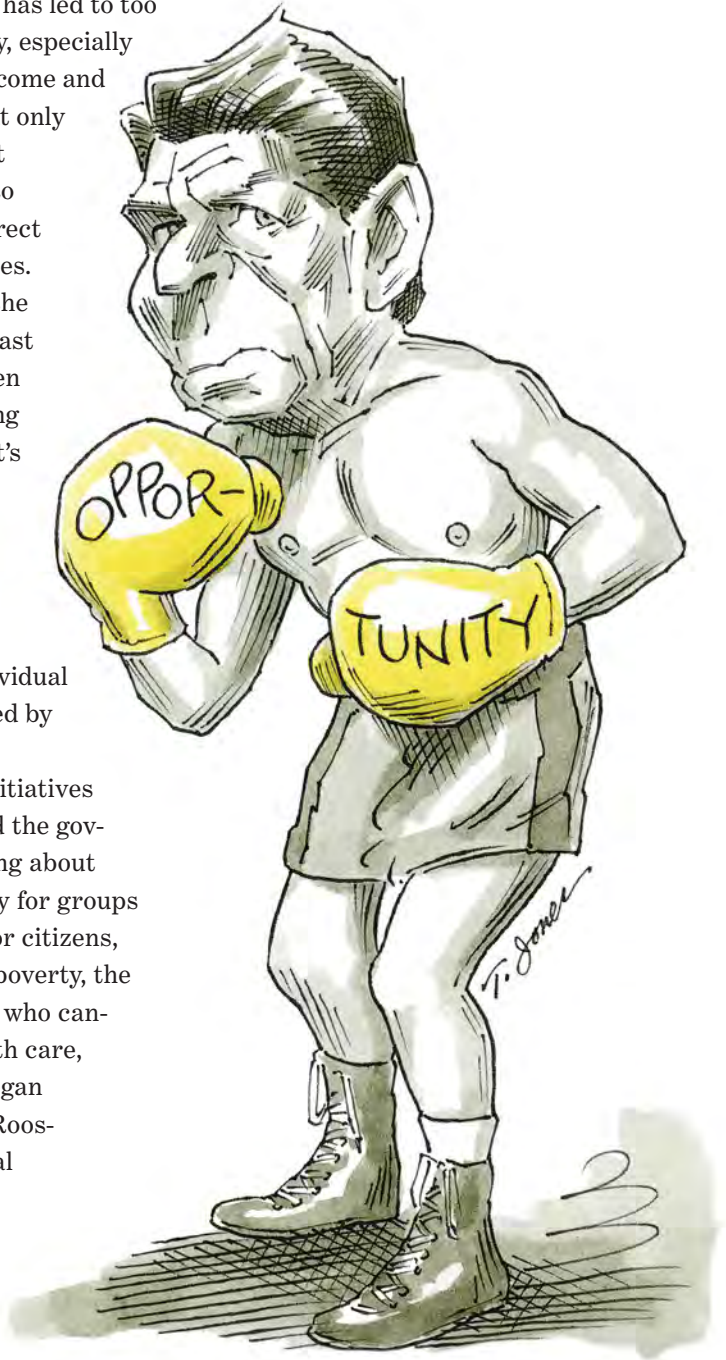
The term has a history of use in finances to denote the building of capital. The first definition in the Merriam-Webster dictionary is simply “justice according to natural law or right.” Scholar Shelby Steele, reviewing its previous meaning, says the current use of the term “has no meaning.” Perhaps it derives from a sense that a new term is needed for marketing purposes, or because the term “equality” hasn’t accomplished all it should.

## WHAT GOVERNMENT CAN AND CAN’T DO

At the same time we ask these fresh questions, we continue to face the question debated by the founders and progressives about the proper role of government in equality. Conservatives argue that America is fundamentally built on individual liberty and that the proper role of government is

to protect that. Liberals, on the other hand, argue that individual freedom has led to too much inequality, especially inequality of income and wealth, and that only the government has the power to step in and correct these inequalities. In some ways, the history of the past century has been one of increasing the government's role in favor of greater equality, with only occasional returns to the primacy of individual liberty promoted by the founders.

A series of initiatives has empowered the government to bring about greater equality for groups of people: senior citizens, those living in poverty, the disabled, those who cannot afford health care, and so on. It began with Franklin Roosevelt's New Deal and the development of



Social Security to afford special protections for the elderly. But Lyndon Johnson's Great Society of the 1960s greatly accelerated government intervention by providing equalizing assistance to groups of people seen as needing that boost. The Great Society premise was LBJ's view that, as he stated in his 1965 Howard University commencement address, it wasn't enough to open the gates of opportunity, but you had to have a real chance to walk through them. This would require extra government assistance if you had been held down by poverty or racism, and his Great Society implemented many such programs, especially its War on Poverty and related job and education efforts. Critics questioned whether government should be discriminating in favor of certain groups, as well as whether government could actually accomplish any meaningful leveling of the playing field in this way.

The president who tacked back in the direction of the founders' understanding of equality of opportunity was Ronald Reagan. His view was that government not only should not, but it *could* not effectively, create equality of opportunity. He famously said that the government had declared war on poverty but that poverty had won. Government was not, he said, the solution to the problem; "government is the problem." Reagan's understanding of what he called "the opportunity society" was to shrink government and

its taxation so that it got out of the way of people's individual freedom and choices, including the freedom to pursue their own opportunities. In par-

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### ***Does government belong in the business of taking money from someone who earned it and giving it to another?***

ticular, Reagan objected to government planners who ran programs trying to direct the choices and opportunities that individuals might make.

By and large, however, the policy debate since the time of Franklin Roosevelt has not been whether, but how much, government can and should help those needing special assistance. The welfare state has continued to grow. In the twenty-first century, however, the terms of the debate have shifted dramatically. With proposals that government must tackle income inequality, or even wealth inequality, the pendulum is shifting away from equality of opportunity to something else.

### **A DEMAND TO SEIZE WEALTH**

French economist Thomas Piketty is the harbinger of an even more sweeping view of equality in the twenty-first century. The new conception of equality

concerns itself primarily with income and wealth, arguing that until those are addressed, there is no real equality in our society.

Piketty presents extensive data showing a dramatic rise in global wealth since the 1980s, due especially to inherited wealth and investment gains, unrelated to work or effort, which he calls “patrimonial capitalism.” Piketty argues that government’s normal fiscal and social tools would not be enough to address this new, sweeping inequality. Instead, he argues, there needs to be “a progressive global tax on capital,” not so much to “finance the social state but to regulate capitalism.” Piketty’s most recent book, *A Brief History of Equality* (2022), argues that the whole idea of human progress is to move toward greater equality.

Piketty seeks something well beyond equality of opportunity: he is pursuing nothing less than a complete reordering of the economic system. He is as much concerned with taking power and money from the wealthy as he is with creating greater opportunity for the poor, if not more. The levers he would push are power, justice, capitalism, and wealth,

not mere opportunity. And there are signs that some progressive politicians are paying atten-

tion. Senator Bernie Sanders, for example, has advocated a special tax “on the extreme wealth of the top 0.1 percent.” President Joe Biden has jumped on this bandwagon, proposing his own new tax on billionaires (based not just on income but also on wealth). These moves are short of Piketty’s call for an economic revolution, but they advance his core thinking about power, wealth, capitalism, and inequality.

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***Ronald Reagan famously said that the government had declared war on poverty but that poverty had won.***

## **CAN EQUALITY OF OPPORTUNITY BE SAVED?**

One end of the spectrum is traditional equality of opportunity as envisioned and embraced by the founders. In this view, men and women are created equal and therefore have equal rights, especially political and legal rights. From that starting point, people are free to make their own choices on how, as the Declaration of Independence put it, to pursue happiness. Guaranteeing individual rights, so that people are free to choose, is the primary role of government in this traditional view of equality of opportunity. Paring back the role of government regulation in people’s lives, reducing taxes, and promoting individual freedom was President Reagan’s path back toward this more traditional view and many conservatives still advocate this today.

But liberals argue that the government must engage in programs to increase equality of opportunity for the poor and disadvantaged, and also for ethnic groups that have been left behind in society. Johnson's Great Society sought to move the federal government strongly in this direction, but history suggests that it is very difficult for government to move the needles on opportunity and equality. Government keeps adding to the social safety net and building out the welfare state in the hope of creating greater equality. Do we need to add universal health care to the social and economic agenda? Should we pay off everyone's college debt?

Conservatives argue that this is not the proper role of government and such programs do not work, but the debate and policy implementation continue.

Now, several movements on the left have created a new end of the progressive spectrum; perhaps we could call it a super-progressive stance on equality or "the new, new left."

## IMMIGRANTS KEEP THE DREAM ALIVE

Does America continue to be a land of opportunity? Interestingly, the strongest answer comes from immigrants, who overwhelmingly state that this American characteristic is why they have come to the United

States. Two economists, Ran Abramitzky and Leah Boustan, recently pulled together what they call "the first truly big set of data about immigration" from cen-

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***Second-generation immigrants find strong job and economic opportunities in the United States. In fact, they outperform native-born Americans.***

sus records, presenting them in their new book: *Streets of Gold: America's Untold Story of Immigrant Success* (2022, PublicAffairs). They found that second-generation immigrants, especially, found strong job and economic opportunities in the United States and, in fact, outperformed native-born Americans. As co-author Abramitzky told the *New York Times*, "The American dream is just as alive now as it was a century ago."

The huge demand from immigrants to come to America and find greater opportunity is strong evidence that opportunity still works and remains a key to the American dream. Economic mobility offers more evidence. While studies have shown growth in economic inequality, other studies have shown that economic mobility—the ability to move from one quadrant of income



to another—is still alive in America. Perhaps the most important factor in developing opportunity, and one that finds broad support in the middle ground, is education. This is where both liberals and conservatives agree and could work together effectively.

## **TOWARD THE GREATER GOOD**

Equality of opportunity, rightly understood, is not a set of government programs or policy prescriptions. Since we understand that complete equality is not possible, the proper understanding of equality of opportunity is as a point of departure and an aspiration, both a starting point and a goal toward which the society is always working. The key question, then, is not whether equality of opportunity is outdated as a goal but whether we are continuing to make progress toward it. Measuring and discussing progress is the key, not changing the finish line. This is especially so since, as it has been since the founding, the goal of equality in American terms must also be balanced with individual liberty.

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***Equality of opportunity is a point of departure and an aspiration, both a starting point and a goal.***

There are reasons to be optimistic about the future of equality of opportunity. For one thing, the American people believe it describes the American dream—and describes it better than equality of outcome or other goals. For another, immigrants by the millions keep coming to America in search of opportunity; they see something here that perhaps long-settled Americans have lost. Then, too, young people keep looking for new frontiers and opportunities, finding new jobs, new careers, and other parts of the country that support their dreams. There is cause for philosophical optimism in that some are deeply committed to equality, others to liberty and opportunity, but the combination—equality of opportunity—is still a middle ground upon which they can gather.

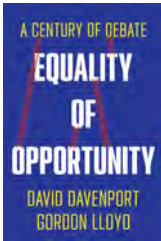
We should acknowledge, however, that there are also reasons for pessimism about the future of equality of opportunity. In this day of hyperpartisanship, those on the left could dig in ever deeper on equity, while those on the right advocate liberty and opportunity. Compromise has become a dirty word.

Whatever happened to equality of opportunity? It is alive and well, but it needs to be appreciated for what it is—a point of departure and an aspiration—not for what it is not, a set of policies or government programs.



Government can and will contribute to the pursuit of the goal, but not to the exclusion of efforts by individuals, nonprofits, and the larger society. ■

*Special to the Hoover Digest. Adapted from **Equality of Opportunity: A Century of Debate** (2023, Hoover Institution Press), by David Davenport and Gordon Lloyd. © 2023 The Board of Trustees of the Leland Stanford Junior University. All rights reserved.*



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# Home at Last

**Fifty years after North Vietnam released the last US prisoners of war, Hoover has opened the letters of former POW and Hoover fellow James B. Stockdale and his wife, Sybil, who worked tirelessly to bring the captives home.**

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**By Jean McElwee Cannon**

**F**ifty years ago, US Navy aviator James B. Stockdale walked down the ramp of a C-141 Starlifter—an aircraft nicknamed the “Hanoi Taxi” by its passengers—and became one of the first American prisoners of war to touch down on mainland American soil during Operation Homecoming, a large-scale effort by the US government to release 591 POWs who had been held in squalid prisons in North Vietnam. As he left the aircraft at Travis Air Force Base, Captain Stockdale said, “The men who follow me down that ramp know what loyalty means because they have been living with loyalty, living off loyalty, for the past several years. I mean loyalty to our military ethic,

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***“The men who follow me down that ramp know what loyalty means.”***

loyalty to our commander in chief, loyalty to each other.” The following day, as spellbound onlookers watched both at San Diego’s Miramar airfield and on television, Jim Stockdale was reunited with his wife and four sons after seven and a half years in which he suffered torture and solitary confinement in the

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*Jean McElwee Cannon is a research fellow and curator for North American Collections at the Hoover Institution Library & Archives.*



***ACE: Naval aviator James B. Stockdale earned twenty-six combat decorations during his long military career. This snapshot shows him in an F-8 Crusader, a naval fighter he flew extensively. As commander of an F-8 squadron in August 1964, he led sorties during what came to be known as the Gulf of Tonkin incident, the trigger for broad US involvement in the Vietnam War. On September 9, 1965, he was flying an A-4 Skyhawk when it was shot down over North Vietnam. Injured and held captive, he became the highest-ranking naval officer held in the “Hanoi Hilton” prison, where he relied on Stoic philosophy to maintain cohesion and morale among captured American servicemen.***

[Hoover Institution Library & Archives]

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hands of his enemy captors. He had been held since September 9, 1965, when his A-4 Skyhawk was shot down over Vietnam.

The return of the POWs was due largely to the loyalty and galvanizing energy of a woman who refused to remain passive while captured American soldiers suffered. While her husband was imprisoned, Sybil Stockdale, wife of James Stockdale, organized the National League of Families of American Prisoners and Missing in Southeast Asia, an activist group that campaigned tirelessly both in the government and in the press for the release of mistreated prisoners of war overseas. Author Heath Hardage Lee, who used the Hoover Institution's Sybil Stockdale collection to write her 2019 book, *The League of Wives: The Untold Story of the Women Who Took on the US Government to Bring Their Husbands Home*, reflected that "Sybil Stockdale was the mother of the national POW/MIA movement. Without her, there would have been no National League of Families to bring the POWs home and account for the missing servicemen.

Sybil's willingness to break with the American government and

military's dictates at the time saved lives." Sybil Stockdale's papers tell the story of a devoted wife turned determined activist who lobbied government leaders, conducted savvy media campaigns, held covert meetings with antiwar groups, and coded secret messages to her imprisoned husband.

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***The Stockdale collections are a window into the political events in the latter years of the Vietnam War.***

This year, marking the fiftieth anniversary of Operation Homecoming, the Hoover Archives has opened the collection of James B. Stockdale, which contains a wealth of correspondence that illuminates the life and career of a man who would not just survive the hated "Hanoi Hilton" prison but who was also a scholar, daring test pilot and instructor, devoted father and husband and son, vice presidential candidate, and eventually, in the 1980s and 1990s, a Hoover Institution senior fellow and highly regarded lecturer in philosophy at Stanford University.

Curators and archivists at the Hoover Archives have worked closely with the Stockdale family in recent years to make the James B. Stockdale papers available to scholars and the public. Sid Stockdale, who has just published his memoir *A World Apart: Growing Up Stockdale during Vietnam*, commented, "The collections at the Hoover Archives are stunning, and combined with their professional world-class staff they provide



***ADVOCATE: Sybil Stockdale, shown accepting a military medal with her sons, spent seven and a half years waiting for her husband to return from captivity in North Vietnam. Alongside raising four boys—Jim, Sid, Stanford, and Taylor—and working to support the family, she advocated for POWs both in government circles and in the press, and established the National League of Families of American Prisoners and Missing in Southeast Asia. The league is still active today, as more than 1,500 American service members from the Vietnam War remain unaccounted for.*** [Hoover Institution Library & Archives]

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researchers an unrivaled experience. I am thrilled my father's letters are open and available to explore and can't wait to see how academics make use of them. I am confident they will be thrilled by the gems they discover."

Combined with the papers of Sybil Stockdale, the James B. Stockdale collection at Hoover constitutes one of the most valuable archives in the nation for understanding the experiences of American POWs and the unfolding political events in the latter years of the Vietnam War.

## FAMILY LETTERS, SECRET MESSAGES

Aside from its vast potential for future scholarship, the James B. Stockdale collection has also been a resource for Operation Homecoming anniversary events created to raise awareness of the history of the era. In May 2023, the Richard Nixon Presidential Library in Yorba Linda, California, opened its gallery exhibition *Captured: Shot Down in Vietnam*, which featured loaned materials from Hoover's Stockdale collections, including photographs, letters, and memorabilia. The opening gala of the exhibition brought together dozens of surviving POWs for a parade and a re-creation of the famous Operation Homecoming White House dinner—the largest dinner ever served at the White House—that was hosted by Richard and Pat Nixon on May 24, 1973. The exhibition is complemented by a podcast of the same title that discusses Jim Stockdale's time in Vietnam and features an interview with his son Sid.

Many of the most illuminating letters now available in the James B. Stockdale collection include those written by a young Jim to his parents, Mabel and Vernon Stockdale, between 1933 and 1965. The future vice admiral was born in Abingdon, Illinois, in 1923. He graduated from the US Naval Academy in 1946. The letters from the 1950s and early 1960s in particular reveal the intellectual and emotional growth of a talented young man making a series of personal and career choices that would influence the rest of his life. As a young test pilot at Naval Air Station Patuxent River in Maryland between 1954 and 1957, for example, Stockdale toyed with taking his aviation career in a new and possibly dangerous direction: outer space. At that time, the most intrepid test pilots were being recruited for the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) that would be signed into existence by President Dwight Eisenhower on July 29, 1958. Stockdale was intrigued.

NASA's creation caused an identity crisis among test pilots; some, such as Chuck Yeager, believed that being shot out of the Earth's atmosphere by a rocket did not count as pure aviation (and he also resented his best pilots being poached away from military service). Other pilots believed America's moonshot to be the most exciting opportunity the twentieth century could provide aviators. As the conflict in Vietnam escalated, Stockdale eventually decided to stay with the Navy instead of venturing to NASA, but during his time at Patuxent River he tutored a young Marine Corps aviator in mathematics and physics who would become a lifelong friend: John Glenn. Glenn would become the first man to orbit the Earth in 1962, applauded internationally for his feat just three years before Stockdale would be shot down over North Vietnam.





***STOIC: In captivity, James B. Stockdale refused to collaborate with the enemy and encouraged his fellow imprisoned servicemen to do the same. When his North Vietnamese jailers sought to parade him publicly to prove their humane treatment of POWs, Stockdale slashed his own scalp with a razor rather than be used as propaganda. Forced to wear a hat, he bruised his face. For this and other insubordination, he would spend two full years in leg irons in the infamous “Alcatraz” section of the prison. [Hoover Institution Library & Archives]***

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Though Glenn became a celebrity after his voyage to space, he maintained his friendship with the Stockdales and continued to intersect with their history. For instance, in October 1966 Sybil Stockdale realized that her husband's North Vietnamese captors, in blatant defiance of the Geneva Convention, had been denying packages to prisoners—and both she and the other POW wives with whom she had begun having monthly meetings

desperately wanted Christmas packages to reach their husbands. With the help of naval intelligence officer Robert Burroughs, she

composed a letter to Jim Stockdale (which she knew would be screened by his captors) laced with confrontational knowledge of Geneva Convention protocols.

She also reached out to her old friend John Glenn to obtain astronaut rations for the prisoners. Dehydrated yet nutritious, astronaut food was easy to pack in bulk for posting and could possibly provide—in prison terms—a lavish holiday meal. Faithful to his old friends from test pilot days, Glenn contacted the Pillsbury Company, the contractor that had developed astronaut food for NASA. Pillsbury donated the equivalent of eighty meals in airtight packets for the POWs. Unfortunately, the astronaut food did not reach Stockdale; on Christmas Day 1966 he was dragged out of solitary confinement, and as a holiday gift (proffered by a guard “in accordance with the humane and lenient treatment of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam”) he was given one banana and two letters, written and sent months before by his wife. All was not lost on this grim holiday, however; hidden on the back of a photograph inserted in one of the letters were instructions for using invisible carbon to communicate with Sybil. Back in his cell, Stockdale discovered the instructions and a “whole new world” of uncensored communications opened to him.

The Stockdale collections at Hoover include these coded letters. As they attest, the couple's correspondence became one of the primary means by which the US government learned of the war crimes committed at Hoa Lo, the “Hanoi Hilton.”

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***Stockdale tutored a young Marine pilot named John Glenn, who would become the first astronaut to orbit the Earth.***

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***President Ford awarded Vice Admiral Stockdale the Medal of Honor in 1976.***

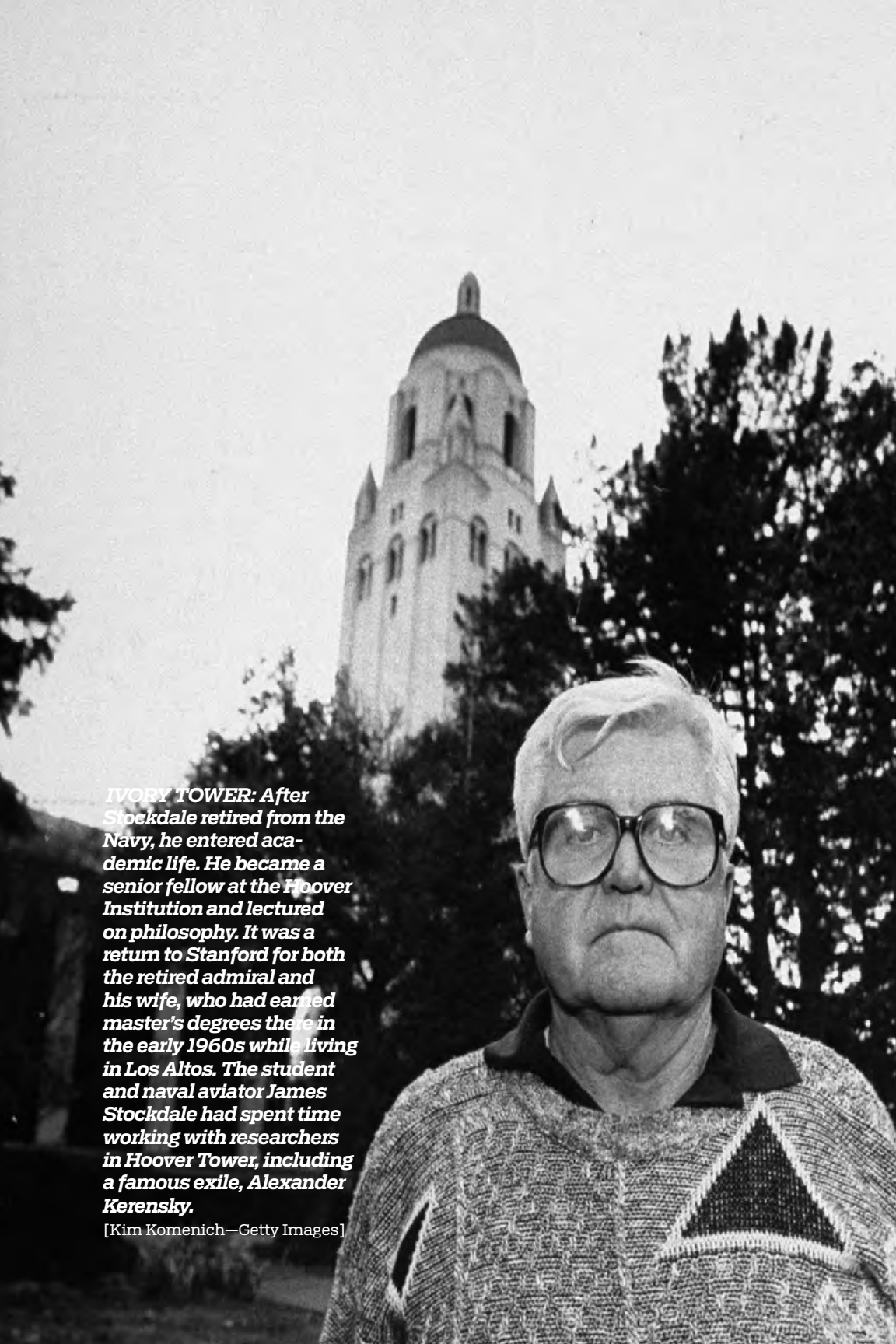


***SUSTAINING HOPE: On Veterans' Day 1970, the Los Angeles–based student group Voices in Vital America launched a campaign of creating and selling bracelets featuring the names and shoot-down dates of captured servicemen as a way of raising money for the POW/MIA movement. The bracelets quickly caught the attention of Sybil Stockdale and other POW wives; public response grew swiftly, and within months the organization was receiving approximately 12,000 requests for bracelets per day. [Hoover Institution Library & Archives]***

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## **HALLS OF ACADEMIA**

After his time as a test pilot in Maryland in the late 1950s, Stockdale had been assigned to California—and in 1960, the Navy gave him the opportunity to pursue a master of arts degree in international relations at Stanford University, which he earned in 1962. Sybil entered graduate school at Stanford



**IVORY TOWER:** *After Stockdale retired from the Navy, he entered academic life. He became a senior fellow at the Hoover Institution and lectured on philosophy. It was a return to Stanford for both the retired admiral and his wife, who had earned master's degrees there in the early 1960s while living in Los Altos. The student and naval aviator James Stockdale had spent time working with researchers in Hoover Tower, including a famous exile, Alexander Kerensky.*

[Kim Komenich—Getty Images]





***REFLECTIONS: Jim and Sybil Stockdale were co-authors of a memoir, *In Love and War: The Story of a Family's Ordeal and Sacrifice During the Vietnam Years*, in which they wrote alternating chapters from their dual perspectives of the long struggle. The book became a 1987 NBC made-for-television movie of the same name, starring James Woods as the aviator and Jane Alexander as his wife. The film and Woods were nominated for Golden Globe awards.***

[Kim Komenich—Getty Images]

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as well, enrolling in a master's program in education. In their jointly written book *In Love and War: The Story of a Family's Ordeal and Sacrifice During the Vietnam Years*, the Stockdales reflect upon their time at Stanford as a happy one—an idyllic prelude to the hardship that would follow once Jim was sent overseas to Vietnam in 1964. The couple bought a house in pastureland near Los Altos, where their young sons were free to roam. The two enjoyed their studies and their fellow students and instructors. On December 6, 1959, Sybil gave birth to their third child, whom they named Stanford.

Jim, engrossed in his classes, entertained the idea of leaving the Navy to pursue a career in academia. Perhaps most important, Jim became enthralled with studying the Stoic philosophy of the ancient Greek thinker Epictetus. Years later, after returning from the horrors of the Hanoi Hilton, Stockdale would frequently claim that it was his study of Stoicism that



***OLD ACQUAINTANCE: Fifty years after being released from captivity in North Vietnam, Eugene “Red” McDaniel and Norman “Mac” McDaniel, two former American POWs, embrace at the opening of the exhibition Captured: Shot Down in Vietnam at the Richard Nixon Presidential Library on May 23, 2023. The exhibition features materials from Hoover’s newly opened James B. Stockdale papers.*** [Richard Nixon Foundation]

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allowed him mentally to endure the agony of incarceration, torture, and starvation.

The Stockdales’ time at Stanford also established the groundwork for Jim Stockdale’s connection to the Hoover Institution, where he would become a fellow in 1981. His letters to his parents, particularly those from 1961, reveal that he was using his time at Stanford to refine his views on politics, philosophy, religion, and current affairs—often from the halls of Hoover Tower.

In a letter to his parents dated April 23, 1961, he reports that he has been offered a desk and a job in Hoover Tower after being recruited by

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***The Stockdales reflected upon their time at Stanford as happy—an idyllic prelude to the hardship that would follow once Jim was sent to Vietnam.***



a graduate student for a project on the history of the Taiwan Strait that would involve reviewing documents such as translations of foreign radio broadcasts produced by the CIA, US State Department files, Soviet documents translated by the British government, and transcriptions of Navy hearings in Congress. Excited by access to archival documents, Stockdale

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***The “Stockdale paradox” is a belief that optimism must be counterbalanced by an appraisal and acceptance of grim realities.***

ing a growing interest in the history of the Russian Revolution of 1917. And whom has he met at Hoover Tower, which he reminds his parents emphasizes the study of war, revolution, and peace? None other than a rare-books curator: Alexander Kerensky. (Kerensky, exiled from his native country, was the prime minister of revolutionary Russia who was driven from power by Lenin in 1917.)

## **JOINING THE FELLOWSHIP**

Despite lingering health concerns from his time in prison, Stockdale would move on from his Vietnam experience to a long and fruitful career. He fulfilled many of the dreams of pursuing research, writing, and participation in politics that he expressed in his letters to his parents in the early 1960s. In 1976, he was awarded the Medal of Honor. After serving as president of the Naval War College, he retired from the Navy.

In 1981, he became a Hoover fellow and a sought-after lecturer in philosophy at Stanford. He wrote several books during his time as a fellow; the four he published with the Hoover Institution Press remain among the

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***Jim Stockdale prevailed through the most harrowing circumstances of a brutal war.***

And in 2001, Stockdale’s cherished Stoic wisdom became a mainstream staple of business and personal growth strategies. Author and Stanford Business School professor Jim Collins, in his book *Good to Great: Why Some Companies Make the Leap and Others Don’t*, defined the

reports to his parents, “This is ‘pure’ research, the way historians do it.” Subsequently in the letter, he mentions he has been studying European history and develop-

imprint’s bestsellers. In 1992, he gained nationwide attention as the vice presidential running mate of third-party candidate Ross Perot.



***HOME FROM SEA: The USS Stockdale, an Arleigh Burke-class guided-missile destroyer, flies the US and POW flags as it heads for its home port of San Diego. The ship was christened by Stockdale's widow, Sybil, and delivered to the Navy in 2008.*** [US Navy]

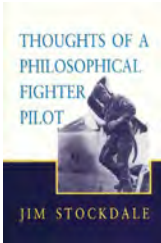
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“Stockdale paradox” as a belief that optimism must be counterbalanced by an appraisal and acceptance of grim realities. In the book, Collins relates that over lunch with Stockdale he asked him about strategies for surviving hardships, and Stockdale replied, “You must never confuse faith that you will prevail in the end—which you can never afford to lose—with the discipline to confront the most brutal facts of your current reality, whatever they might be.”

James Stockdale died in 2005; Sybil passed away in 2015. The newly opened letters of James B. Stockdale will allow scholars to understand the many decisive moments of an extraordinary life. Cultivating discipline, will, knowledge, and valor, Stockdale prevailed through the most harrowing circumstances of a brutal war. His letters, testaments to his philosophy and endurance, await visitors to Hoover who will read them with the same enthusiasm for “pure research” as a young Jim had in 1961. The Hoover Archives is proud to add the opening of the letters to the many significant

commemorative events that will mark the anniversary of the Operation Homecoming that Sybil Stockdale and countless other family members of captured and missing servicemen struggled so hard to achieve. ■

*Special to the Hoover Digest.*



Available from the Hoover Institution Press is ***Thoughts of a Philosophical Fighter Pilot***, by Jim Stockdale. To order, call (800) 888-4741 or visit [www.hooverpress.org](http://www.hooverpress.org).

# On the Cover

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**T**his bird's-eye Russian map from 1915 shows the Dardanelles, the narrow waterway controlling access to the Sea of Marmara and the Black Sea. Together with the even-narrower Bosphorus, the passage divides Europe from Asia—and Istanbul from itself—and figures prominently in history, both ancient and modern. The stylized castle at the bottom of the map sits near the site of ancient Troy, today a historical park. This map describes a bloody campaign during the early years of the First World War that proved significant to the birth of modern Turkey, which this month is a hundred years old.

That 1915–16 campaign was an Anglo-French landing on the Gallipoli Peninsula (the left side of the map), in which the Entente forces tried to “force the gates” of the Dardanelles, which Ottoman Turkey had closed. Considered the first large amphibious landing in modern military history, the Gallipoli campaign was intended to push through Turkey, which had declined to stay neutral after war broke out in the summer of 1914, and relieve the czarist Russian Empire, including access to its Ukrainian grain fields. British First Lord of the Admiralty Winston Churchill thought the strait was poorly defended and that Gallipoli would lead to quick victory and ease pressure on the charnel house of the Western Front.

The Entente forces were quickly checked. The Gallipoli campaign cost vast numbers of lives on both sides, and it cost Churchill his position. Gallipoli is remembered not just for the appalling sacrifices but for how the battle helped shape the national identities of Australia and New Zealand, whose “Anzac” forces were in the spearhead (other Commonwealth troops from India and Africa fought here, too). Gallipoli drew a template for the Great War’s bloodiest feature, stalemated trench warfare, and broadcast a harsh warning to planners of amphibious attacks in future wars. It also brought wide attention to a military commander there, Mustafa Kemal, who would emerge as Atatürk, the founder of the Republic of Turkey.

The Ottoman Empire crumbled after the war, and amid the carving up of its territory came the Turkish War of Independence. Kemal established a stronghold in Ankara and led nationalist forces against European occupiers and a compliant government led by the sultan. In 1920, the Allies imposed the Treaty of Sèvres to partition the empire, a pact Kemal and his forces rejected. He eventually expelled a Greek army that had invaded Anatolia; crushed the new Armenian state; ended the sultanate; and agreed to a new territorial division in the Treaty of Lausanne.

Nationalist forces occupied Istanbul, and on October 29, 1923, proclaimed the Republic of Turkey.

The prominence of the “castle” on the map is worth noting. No structure quite so magnificent existed in 1915 to menace the Allies, though it does suggest Turkish fortifications that rained shells on the invading ships and troops from both sides of the “gates.” The architecture is enhanced by the mapmaker’s romantic imagination. The castle might also remind someone viewing the map that twentieth-century battles and invasions were far from the first to be fought on these shores. Xerxes I and his Persian army came west into Thrace in 480 BC. Self-taught archaeologist Heinrich Schliemann came looking for traces of Homer’s Trojan War and found them here in 1870. He reported layer after layer of history, though some of his finds were fanciful. Archaeologists continue to sift Troy’s ruins for signs of the war and peace that have been pursued at the gates of the Dardanelles since antiquity.

Turkey has celebrated its centennial, in part, by dedicating the new 1915 Çanakkale Bridge (the year 1915 is part of the bridge’s name and celebrates the naval victory). It is the world’s longest suspension bridge and the first fixed crossing ever thrown over the Dardanelles.

—Charles Lindsey





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The Institution's overarching goals are to:

- » ***Understand the causes and consequences of economic, political, and social change***
- » ***Analyze the effects of government actions and public policies***
- » ***Use reasoned argument and intellectual rigor to generate ideas that nurture the formation of public policy and benefit society***

Herbert Hoover's 1959 statement to the Board of Trustees of Stanford University continues to guide and define the Institution's mission in the twenty-first century:

***This Institution supports the Constitution of the United States, its Bill of Rights, and its method of representative government. Both our social and economic systems are based on private enterprise, from which springs initiative and ingenuity. . . . Ours is a system where the Federal Government should undertake no governmental, social, or economic action, except where local government, or the people, cannot undertake it for themselves. . . . The overall mission of this Institution is, from its records, to recall the voice of experience against the making of war, and by the study of these records and their publication to recall man's endeavors to make and preserve peace, and to sustain for America the safeguards of the American way of life.***

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By collecting knowledge and generating ideas, the Hoover Institution seeks to improve the human condition with ideas that promote opportunity and prosperity, limit government intrusion into the lives of individuals, and secure and safeguard peace for all.